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THE GROUNDWORK
OF
CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

REV. PATRICK RYAN

What to do.

Patric W. Barry Jr
St Josephs Seminary
Yonkers, N. Y.

Ryan

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OF
CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

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THE GROUNDWORK
OF
CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

BY THE

REV. PATRICK RYAN

*Author of "Catholic Doctrines Explained and Proved,"
"The Culture of the Soul."*

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PREFACE.

THE favour with which *Catholic Doctrines Explained and Proved* was received has encouraged the author to publish the present little work in the hope that it may do good.

It is not written for any special class of persons. On this account, anything which would lead to the idea that it is a book exclusively for religious, is sedulously avoided.

The principles laid down in it are only those that every good Christian, whether in religion or in the world, ought to know and to live up to.

There are numbers of persons in the world who practise Perfection without any formal aim at it. It is for these especially that we write; as it appears to us that a little direction, and study of the grounds of Perfection, would be a wonderful help to them.

Man's object in life is shown to consist in Charity—in the love of God and the love of our neighbour. We have thought it very important to keep this point before the minds of our readers, because otherwise their devotions may be misdirected. We next deal with the various means of attaining to this end.

The writer has made every effort to put things as briefly and as plainly as possible so that his teaching may be within the reach of the ordinary mind.

He has avoided all digressions and has set before his readers their main business in life, telling them what they must do, rather than what they must not do.

His plan did not permit him when treating of the virtues to treat of the opposite vices.

With slight alterations the opening Chapters are taken for the most part from Father Scaramelli's *Guide to the Spiritual Life*, and the closing Chapters from the *Christian and Religious Perfection* of Father Rodriguez. This course is adopted because the writer believes that nothing better can be said on the subject than has been said by these two masters of the Spiritual Life. Their works cannot be too highly praised. They are excellent, and should be better known and studied.

The Chapters on the Virtues are a summary of St. Thomas's teaching. To treat them at length is outside the scope of the present work.

The desire of the writer is to promote the glory of God, and the spiritual advancement of Christians, so that they may be helped along the path of Perfection to their heavenly country.

PATRICK RYAN.

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THE GROUNDWORK OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

CHAPTER I.

Man's Perfection, in what it consists.

“Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. v. 48).

What does our Divine Lord wish to convey when He tells us to be perfect? He means that we must have the love of God, and the love of our neighbour in our hearts if we are to be pleasing to Him—in other words, that we are to have Charity. Our perfection, then, consists in Charity. That this is so, we will now prove from reason, Sacred Scripture, and the Fathers of the Church.

First Proof from reason: God has imposed a law upon us, and He expects us to fulfil His law. The end of every law is to promote some special perfection in that community for which the law has been enacted. Thus the civil laws have in view the formation of a perfect state; rules of military discipline have for their scope the organization of a perfect army; the laws or rules of monastic life are framed to develop religious orders which shall be pre-eminent in some particular virtue.

Almighty God in giving us His law had for his

sole aim to form us into perfect Christians. Thus all our perfection should consist in the perfect fulfilment of God's laws, and consequently, in Charity, which according to the Apostle, is the fulfilment of God's laws. "Love therefore is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii. 10).

Second Proof from reason: The perfection of everything created consists in the attainment of the end peculiar to itself; thus we say that an eye is perfect when it sees objects distinctly, because the end for which the eye was made is to see; we call an ear perfect when it distinguishes sounds and words with accuracy, for the ear was made to hear; we call a light perfect when it shows us everything clearly and well-defined; we call a fire perfect when it burns actively, for the end of light and fire is thus attained. Thus, too, speaking of the fine arts, we consider a brush perfect, if it is well adapted for painting, and a pen, if well suited for writing; because the end of the former is to paint, of the latter to write.

To determine therefore in what man's perfection consists, it suffices to know what that thing is which unites us to our last end, which is God, Who alone created us, and Who alone now rules us, and preserves us in life. That this thing is Charity, the Beloved Disciple lays down in plain terms.

"He that abideth in Charity, abideth in God, and God in him" (St. John, I. Epis., iv. 16).

"If any one love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come down to him, and will make our abode with him" (John xiv. 23).

"But above all these things have Charity, which is the **bond** of perfection" (Coloss. iii. 14). St. Paul infers that Charity unites the Spirit of God to the spirit of man with the bond of divine love, and of the two forms one spirit (1 Cor. vi. 17).

No wonder, then, that he calls Charity "the bond of perfection," since Charity, which unites us with

our last end, alone can make us perfect, and alone constitutes the whole essence of our perfection (Scaramelli, Vol. I, Section 1, Article 1, Chapter I).

First Proof from Sacred Scripture: "If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

And if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not Charity, I am nothing.

And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. xiii. 1-3).

Here St. Paul lays down that Charity is absolutely indispensable for salvation; since without it the most distinguished gifts—whether of tongues, of prophecy, or miracles, as well as the most heroic acts of virtue—will ultimately prove of no avail.

He says that if he had the gift of tongues, and could speak not only all human languages, but also languages so exquisite as we may suppose the angels themselves to employ, were they to speak, and have not Charity; he would be like the sounding brass, or the tinkling cymbal, which wears away, while emitting a pleasing sound.

And if he should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if he should have all faith, so that he could remove mountains, and have not Charity, he would still be nothing. And even if he were to go further and to practise the most heroic acts, such as giving all his goods to feed the poor, or suffering martyrdom, still if he had not Charity these things would profit him nothing.

From all this it follows that Charity is the very essence of Christian Perfection, that all other virtues derive their efficacy from their union with Charity, and that, if they are exercised apart from Charity, they are of no avail.

Second Proof from Sacred Scripture: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind.

This is the greatest and first commandment.

And the second is like to this: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets" (Matt. xxii. 36-40).

Here our Divine Lord clearly states that the whole law of God is fulfilled by the love of God and of our neighbour. But man's perfection consists in the fulfilment of God's law; therefore, man's perfection must consist in Charity.

St. Augustine lays down the same doctrine when he says: "Jesus Christ is our end; by Him then we are made perfect: for all our perfection is to tend towards Him, not, of course, by a bodily movement, but by affections of the heart, and, therefore, by a close union with Him in the sweet bond of Charity" (In Ps. lvi).

"Charity that is newly born, is perfection in its infancy; Charity that is on the increase is mature perfection; great Charity is great perfection, perfect Charity is entire and complete perfection" (St. Augustine, *Lib. de Nat. et Grat.*).

Here St. Augustine makes no distinction between Charity and perfection, showing that in his opinion they are one and the same thing. From which it follows that perfection consists in Charity.

It may be well here to distinguish between the perfection of saints and angels in heaven, and the perfection to which men can attain in this life.

The one is complete perfection. The other is, if we may so speak, imperfect perfection.

The saints and the angels are continually adoring and praising God. They see God face to face, His glory and splendour is so shining before them that they are drawn to love Him.

In this life we can never attain such perfection, because let us do what we will we cannot escape all venial sins. For this we should receive a special privilege from God, such as He has vouchsafed to none but to the Blessed Virgin (Council of Trent, Session VI. can. 23).

If we fall into sins, however small, it follows that we cannot be completely perfect.

Moreover in our present state we, as it were, see God through a veil, through the things which He has created, and seeing Him in this manner we are liable to forget Him at times; but if we give up contemplating God we cannot be completely perfect, because complete perfection consists in continually loving God.

Again, the affairs of life weigh us down to the earth and hinder us from perpetually contemplating and loving God as the blessed do in heaven. Hence it follows that we cannot attain supreme perfection in this life.

This is the teaching of St. Thomas. And hence the Apostle of the Gentiles hit, so to say, the mark exactly, when, speaking of perfection in this life, he called it the perfection of a child; and speaking of perfection in the next life, he called it full-grown, manly perfection (1 Cor. xiii. 10).

The Apostle, says the Angelic Doctor, compares the perfection of our present life to the age of youth, which is feeble and imperfect; and he likens the perfection of the life of blessedness to the state of manhood, which has already reached its perfection of strength and vigour:—to give us to understand how imperfect is our perfection, which like a child, is always in a state of growth and advancement; and how complete is the perfection of the blessed, which like a full-grown man, has already attained perfect stature.

Let us then sum up by understanding clearly what we are to hold. The perfection of us, mortal men,

compared to the perfection of the immortal Spirits now reigning in their heavenly country, is, on many accounts, ever wanting, and must be spoken of as defective and imperfect perfection. But if we compare it with the state of this our present life, and with the capabilities of our feeble forces, we may and must speak of it as true perfection. Nay, when it increase much and attains, if we may so speak, a greater finish, it may be termed great perfection, heroic perfection, sublime perfection.

It follows consequently that the highest perfection of the saints here below is reduced to this, that their passions being mortified create little disturbance in them, are easily and quickly overcome, and that the venial sins which they commit are not fully deliberate and are rapidly effaced by the good and meritorious works which are familiar to them.

This is the view of Suarez and the teaching of St. Augustine.

That man is perfect, says the holy bishop of Hippo, who falls not into the more serious sins—those, namely, which are committed with full deliberation—and who strives by almsgiving and other good works to purify his soul from the sins he has committed.

Nor, says the Angelic Doctor, does the perfection of our present state require that we should be united to God by a continual and uninterrupted exercise of love: such perfection belongs to our heavenly country, not to the slippery pathway of this life.

To be perfect here, it suffices that we find ease in the practice of union with God, so far as is consistent with the occupations in which it is the will of God that we should be engaged during our present life (Scaramelli, Vol. I, Section 1, Article i, Chapter I).

We must also distinguish between essential perfection and instrumental perfection.

Essential perfection is the thing itself—Charity—the love of God and the neighbour.

Instrumental perfection is the means for acquiring

this Charity. Whenever an object is to be attained there must be some means for attaining it. We can accomplish no object without having recourse to the means, for example we cannot write a letter without pen, ink, and paper. These are the means, and if we do not have recourse to them we cannot write. If we want to build a house we must get the stones, mortar, timber, etc., and so of everything else. We cannot attain any object without having recourse to the means.

It is the same in the spiritual life. We have an object to attain, viz. Charity, and we cannot attain it without having recourse to the means. God imposes no obligation without giving the means of fulfilling it. There must therefore be some means for acquiring Charity. What these means are we shall see later on in this work.

Thus far we have almost entirely treated of love towards God.

It will not be difficult to show that we are also bound to love our neighbour. God has commanded us to do so. "And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. xxii. 39).

We are to love our neighbour as ourselves, which means that the love we have for our neighbour should resemble the love we bear ourselves, that is, that we should love our neighbour for God and in God. "All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. vii. 12).

"We ought to love all men, to carry them all in our hearts, after the example of God who loves them all" (St. Augustine).

"If the words of a father hastening to his grave are so sweet, pleasant, and important, what impression must the words of Christ have upon his heirs"? Now we are the children of Jesus Christ, and at the last supper when He was making His last testament He told His disciples to love one another. "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one

another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (John xiii. 34, 35).

We are therefore commanded in the most express terms by Almighty God to love our neighbour, that is, to love all men.

But apart from the command of God there is still another reason, and when it is well considered a very powerful reason, why we ought to love our fellow man, viz. that he has the grace of God in his soul, or is capable of having it. If man possesses the grace of God he thereby becomes the very temple of the Holy Ghost and must in consequence become beautiful and an object of love.

This love of our neighbour is inseparably bound up with the love of God. "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother; he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not? And this commandment we have from God, that he, who loveth God, love also his brother" (1 John iv. 20, 21.)

St. Dorotheus illustrating the connection between the love of God and the love of our neighbour says: "The nearer lines drawn from the circumference approach the centre of a circle, the nearer they approach each other; the more they recede from the centre, the more they separate from each other. Similar is the nature of Charity—the more we are united to God by love, the more we are united to one another."

"The love of God and of our neighbour are two parts which compose one whole, two links which form but one chain, two acts of one virtue, two different actions which proceed from charity as their source, two manners of meriting before God, one of which is not found without the other" (St. Gregory the Great).

We must, therefore, love our neighbour, because Jesus Christ has given us the example, and has

commanded us to do so. Our neighbour is a child of God made to the image and likeness of God, he has an immortal soul, redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ, and for these reasons we are bound to love Him.

“Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as most dear children: And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us” (Eph. v. 1, 2).

So sublime is the doctrine of our Divine Lord that He will have us love even our enemies. “But I say to you, love your enemies: do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; that you may be the children of your Father, who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust” (Matt. v. 44, 45).

It may be useful for us to ask ourselves the questions, how are we to know if we love God? how are we to know if we love our neighbour?

If we want to know do we love God we have only to apply the test left us by our Divine Lord himself. “If you love me keep my commandments.” If we are breaking God’s law, if we are falling into mortal sin, it is a sign that we do not love God.

If we want to know do we love our neighbour we have only to ask ourselves the question are we prepared to do kind offices for our neighbour? Are we prepared to inconvenience ourselves for his sake? “My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth” (1 John iii. 18).

Sympathy and sweet words are very nice—in fact they may be useful and very consoling, but we must remember that they cost us nothing. To speak beautifully of bread to a poor beggar will not satisfy his hunger.

Who was neighbour to the man who fell among robbers? (Luke x. 30-35). Was not it the good Samaritan? The man who did the good? The man who relieved the helpless and bound up the wounds of him who was left half dead by the roadside?

CHAPTER II.

All are bound to become Perfect.

We have proved that man's perfection consists in the love of God and in the love of his neighbour. We will now show that God has imposed on each and everyone the obligation to strive after perfection in his respective state.

Jesus Christ speaks clearly on this point, and speaks to all. Our Redeemer commands us to be perfect, and sets before us the model which we are to strive to realize; it is nothing less than the perfection of His heavenly Father, "Be you therefore perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. v. 48).

St. James, the Apostle, will have us to be wholly perfect, and in nothing deficient (St. James i. 4).

St. Paul warns us to stand ever armed against the assaults of our enemies, and to be in all things perfect (Eph. vi. 13).

There can, then, be no question as to our obligation of striving after perfection.

But since, according to the various conditions of different individuals, the perfection varies to which each one must tend, we must distinguish, in order to act with method and discretion, between such as are Religious, consecrated to God by holy vows, and seculars who are free and their own masters.

We must be careful neither to heap burdens unnecessarily on the former: nor to exempt others from the obligations they have contracted.

Religious men and women, according to the teaching of St. Thomas, though not bound under pain of grievous sin to be perfect, are bound by such an obligation to tend to, and to aspire after perfection.

Just as apprentices who are put to learn the trade

of a smith or carpenter, are not bound to turn out perfect specimens of work in wood or iron, but are obliged to endeavour to perfect themselves in their trade; and though they may not deserve blame for blunders in their handiwork, they would still deserve both rebuke and chastisement were they not to amend and improve day by day: even so, God will never call a Religious to account for not being perfect, since the religious state into which one has entered, is not a gathering of persons already perfect, but a school of perfection.

Yet such a one will be grievously guilty, and deserving of punishment, should he fail to strive after the perfection to which he is bound to aspire by his religious profession, and to amend and improve his life and conversation by the means his rule prescribes.

Every Religious is most strictly bound to the observance of the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. A Religious has engaged himself by solemn vow to keep these counsels as a means of attaining to perfection.

A Religious is also strictly held to the observance of his rules, the means by which he has bound himself at his religious profession to tend to perfection. Such is the teaching of St. Thomas, who says: "A Religious is not bound to every exercise whereby perfection may be attained, but only to such as are prescribed by the rule he has professed."

That priests, and monks, and nuns are bound to tend to, and to aspire after perfection seems to be admitted by all. This is, if we may so speak, their profession in life. This is the reason why they left home, and friends, and the world with all its attractions to follow Christ.

But now comes the question, what are we to say to persons living in the world, about their obligation of being perfect? Seculars are generally imbued with the foolish idea that perfection is the business of monks and nuns only, and is no concern whatever

of theirs ; that, for themselves it suffices to keep the commandments of God and of His Church in a lump, as it were, and without refining upon them ; and that having done this much, they have done their whole duty. Nay, some will go so far as to make sport of these devout seculars who frequent the Sacraments, devotions, and churches, who are constant in prayer, who employ themselves in works of mercy, and whose bearing is modest and retired ; such they will call crooknecked, hypocrites, saints, bigots, and other similar titles of disdain unworthy of the mouth of any Christian who professes and venerates the teaching of Christ.

Persons of this stamp have to be set free from so harmful a delusion by careful instruction. For this purpose, let them say what they understand by Christian Perfection.

If they understand thereby that sublime and arduous perfection which is implied in the three Gospel Counsels, poverty, chastity, and obedience, they are right in considering it no concern of theirs ; for not being called by God to the Religious state, they are not bound to renounce their property, to forswear marriage, to lead a life of celibacy, or to subject themselves to the obedience of a superior who has to prescribe and appoint their every action.

But if by Christian perfection they understand certain other counsels, and especially certain precepts in slight matters which have been laid by God on the whole mass of the faithful, as, for instance, to live detached from property and wealth though they be possessed thereof ; to make a good use of their means by devoting a portion of them to almsdeeds and to the Divine service ; to flee not only unlawful pleasures, but such occasions and incentives, both proximate and more or less remote, that allure and egg on thoughtless people to such gratifications ; to behave with due modesty and circumspection in their outward dealings ; to choose a spiritual guide for the internal regulation

of their conscience ; to despise the pomps and vanities, the splendour and pride of worldly life, and, if their station require them to keep up certain appearances, to preserve, amid the outward circumstances of rank and wealth, the inward humility and lowliness of heart befitting a follower of Christ ; to bear in patience wrongs, misfortunes, and trials of all kinds ; to love their enemies, refraining not only from yielding to inward acts of resentment, but from all external marks of enmity ; to mortify their passions, withdrawing from them all unreasonable gratifications ; to avoid venial sins, especially such as are deliberate ; to frequent the holy Sacraments ; to pray often ; to reflect from time to time on the maxims of faith which avail so powerfully to keep us in check, and to make us walk cautiously amid the dangers which surround us ; to do many other things commanded by God—even though their omission, on account of the slightness of the matter, be not grievously sinful—or merely counselled by Him, since without precautions of this kind it is morally impossible to lead a well regulated life ; if I say, this is what they understand by Christian Perfection, and they deem it no concern of theirs, inasmuch as they are seculars living in the world, then they are woefully mistaken, for to this perfection all who glory in the name of Christian are most surely called.

Let us listen to what St. Thomas has to say on this point : “All seculars, as well as Religious, are bound within the limits of discretion to do whatever good they can ; as the Book of Ecclesiasticus warns us. There is, indeed, a way of fulfilling this precept by avoiding sin, when a person does what he can in the measure of the requirements of his condition, and is careful not to harbour contempt for the greater good which he might perform, placing thus a hindrance to his spiritual progress.”

Seculars should observe that in this passage the holy Doctor speaks of “obligation.” “precept,” and

“sin”; let them now say, if they have the courage, that perfection is the concern of Religious only.

But, in truth, there is no need of alleging the Authority of the Great Doctor, for the Holy Scriptures are plain enough on this head.

Let us ask to whom did St. James and the Apostle of the Nations address these Epistles wherein they are so earnest in inculcating perfection. Was it to Religious only or to the mass of Christians? When Jesus Christ exclaimed with such energy, “Be you perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect;” when He commanded self-denial, to bear the cross willingly, to be meek and lowly of heart even as Himself, to whom pray was he speaking? Was it only to monks, to Religious, to cloistered virgins, or was it not rather to the whole body of believers who were desirous of being His true and faithful followers?

“Jesus Christ,” as St. Augustine says, “was then speaking to all. Nor are these His teachings to be listened to by virgins only, but not by married women—by widows, but not by those whom matrimony still holds in its bonds—by monks, but not by those who have taken to themselves wives—by the clergy, but not by the laity; no, the whole Church, the whole body of the faithful in their several ranks and degrees are to follow Christ, bearing the Cross upon their shoulders, and none are exempted from putting in practice His most holy lessons.”

St. John Chrysostom, having recited many of the admirable teachings wherein our Blessed Lord exhorts all to a perfect life, makes the apposite reflection that Christ has made no distinction between Religious and seculars, but addresses Himself indiscriminately to each and every one. “And,” the saint continues, “what ruins the whole mass of mankind is the belief that Religious are bound to use all diligence to lead a perfect life, while seculars may, if they list, live heedlessly and remissly.” “Not so, not so,” he proceeds to say, “the same tenor of life is required of all I say this

with all assurance ; though, in reality, it is not I that say it, but Christ Himself, the Judge of all men, who says it with his own lips ;" and then having set forth at full length this most important truth, he winds up as follows : "I do not think that there can be anyone so contentious and shameless as to deny that, as regards many points both seculars and Religious are bound to tend to the very highest perfection."

A weighty authority indeed is this, which none may gainsay without incurring the reproach of great temerity. We may find in his writings much wherewith to stir up desires of perfection in the torpid hearts of slumbering Christians, by showing them how strictly they are bound thereto, according to the teaching of the Holy Fathers and of the Sacred Scripture.

We hope thus to efface from the minds of such persons the pernicious delusion that perfection concerns those only who are shut up in the cloister, that on such alone it is incumbent to lead a devout, exact, and exemplary life, while seculars, provided they keep clear of mortal sin, are free to lead a soft, independent, and unmortified life.

All Christians are bound to perfection, for it is required of all, and in Holy Writ inculcated upon all.

Those assuredly whose consciences are not seared, and who have some fear of God left, some care for their eternal welfare, will find in this thought an efficacious motive to exert themselves to enter upon a course of life more regular and exact (Scaramelli, Vol I, Section 1, Article ii, Chapter II).

CHAPTER III.

Degrees of Perfection.

In Christian perfection, whether essential or instrumental, the Holy Fathers distinguish three degrees, each of which degrees places the person that professes it in one of three different states.

St. Thomas attributes to Charity three stages of growth. The first he calls incipient Charity, the second growing Charity, and the third perfect Charity: whence it follows that the persons in whom Charity resides are divided into three classes: those who are beginners, those who are advancing, and those who are perfect. He founds his teaching on the words of St. Augustine, who speaking of Charity, says, "Charity is born expressly to attain perfection. After birth it is nourished; when nourished, it is strengthened; strengthened, it is made perfect" (Tr. 5, in 1 Epist. Joan).

The Charity, which, yet in its infancy is receiving nourishment, forms the state of beginners; the Charity, which is growing strong, is the state of those who are progressing; the Charity, which having been strengthened becomes perfect, constitutes the state of those who are already perfect.

What is here said of Charity applies equally to all other virtues; for each one has its own beginnings, its own increase, and a perfection proper to itself.

And therefore each virtue may form the three classes spoken of. St. Gregory affirms the same. Every virtue, he says, comprises certain degrees; for its commencement is one thing, its advancement is another, and its perfection is something different from both the preceding (Hom. 15, in Ezech).

Indeed, the Angelic Doctor, after he has applied

the distinction of grades and states just mentioned to the theological virtue of Charity, extends it to the whole of the Spiritual life, and to every faculty of man's soul. In every power of man there is, he says, a beginning, a middle, and an end. Hence there is every reason why these three stages must be found in the Spiritual life: a beginning to which belongs the state of beginners; an intermediate state, which is that of those making an advance; and an end, which corresponds to the state of the perfect.

Every person who is struggling to attain perfection must travel by one of three roads; if he be a beginner in the Spiritual life, he is in the purgative, or as it is sometimes called the negative way; if he has made some progress, he is in the illuminative way; and if he be perfect, he is in the unitive way.

The state of beginners thus belongs to such as are indeed in a state of grace, but whose passions are still in full strength. Such persons have need to wage perpetual war in order to uphold Charity, which totters under the repeated assaults of their unsubdued appetites. These have no facility in the exercise of the virtues, but on the contrary, practise them with great repugnance. These persons are in the purgative way, being wholly employed in purifying the soul from the sins which it has committed, in correcting the evil habits which have been formed during the past life, and in curbing the violence of their passions which are yet rebellious and violent.

The state of proficient is that of such as have partially succeeded in subduing the revolt of their passions, and who in consequence have no difficulty in keeping themselves free from mortal sin; who persevere with courage in the practice of the moral and Theological virtues, but who cannot with the same ease, avoid falling into venial sins, because their affections and appetites are not yet thoroughly under control nor sufficiently repressed. The illuminative way answers to this state which, full of light, enables

all efforts to be directed to the uprooting of the passions, and to the practice of real and solid virtue.

The state of the perfect belongs to those who have gained a complete victory over their passions ; who refrain with ease from every sin both mortal and venial ; and who have a readiness in performing acts of all the virtues, especially of the love of God. The Unitive way corresponds to this state, in which the soul, being settled in a calm and peaceful security, unites itself without difficulty to God with the bond of Divine love.

The Angelic Doctor illustrates this spiritual progress by a comparison with the growth of the human body. Man is born an infant, and at that imperfect age has not the use of his reason, nor even of his limbs, which he knows not how to employ ; so that he is very properly confined in swathing bands.

The child, advancing in years, gradually acquires the use of his reason, and the command of his limbs and senses ; still, in this stage of growth, something more is wanting to the perfect use of limbs, senses, and reason.

At length he arrives at manhood with all his limbs fully formed, and all the powers of his mind developed ; and now he is able to perform every act proper to man with full perfection. This development, the Saint observes, which we see taking place slowly in the body, takes place imperceptibly also in the soul (Scaramelli, Vol. I, Section 1, Article i, Chapter III).

CHAPTER IV.

Man's knowledge of God. How it conduces to the Love of God.

From the preceding Chapters it is manifest that the great object which all men ought to strive after is the love of God.

Our love of things depends in a great measure on the knowledge which we have of them, and on the excellence which we find these things to possess. We have no love for the things which we never heard of, or of which we are entirely ignorant. On the other hand we love the things we know and in which we behold excellence, and the more excellent a thing is, the more our wills are drawn to love it. From this it will be readily understood how important it is for us to have a knowledge of God, of His Attributes, of His Perfections, and of all that He has done on behalf of man.

We know that God is most excellent and most perfect. The more we learn of His greatness the more our wills are drawn to love Him.

It is therefore important for us to speak of God, of our knowledge of Him, and of what He has done for man.

God is a pure Spirit, and cannot be seen by man, nevertheless, God manifests Himself to man in various ways, so that the Creator who is Himself hidden from our eyes makes Himself known for a certainty to us His creatures.

God discloses Himself to us in this life in two ways, viz. (1) by Natural Revelation, (2) by Supernatural Revelation.

Natural Revelation embraces all the truths which we can apprehend by the light of our reason.

The knowledge of intellectual, religious, and ethical truths must be connected with a Divine Revelation of some kind.

This Revelation however in so far as it is natural, is nothing else but the action of God the Creator in giving and preserving to nature its existence, form, and life.

When we contemplate the wonderful works of the Universe, the heavens, the motion of the sun, and the moon, and the stars; the earth and the ocean, and the wonderful harmony with which the vast machinery of the Universe goes on, we are struck with wonder and forced to the conclusion that the Author of all this must be a great, intelligent, and all-powerful Being, and thus as St. Paul says from the visible things which He has made, the invisible things are clearly seen, especially His eternal Power and Divinity (Rom. i. 19).

The study of the things which we behold and which are the works of God give us a knowledge of Him, and ought to inspire us with thoughts of gratitude and love towards God.

Supernatural Revelation is the other source of man's knowledge of Divine things. God in times past has spoken to man by His own voice as He did to Moses when He gave him the Commandments of the Law. He spoke through the Prophets and Sacred writers in the Old Law and in this way made known to man truths which he could never acquire by human reason.

Last of all He revealed Himself through His beloved Son whom He sent for the Redemption of the human race.

Our Divine Lord taught us by His works and by His example. He taught us humility, poverty, obedience, and love of suffering. He loved us to such an extent that he laid down His life for our salvation.

Considering, then, all that God has done for us, that He created us, and gave us being in preference to millions of other creatures which He might have

created, that He gave us immortal souls capable of knowing and loving Him, that He Redeemed us, that He sent the Holy Ghost to sanctify us, we ought to be moved by this knowledge to love God, and to admire His wonderful Perfections, His Omnipotence, His Power, and, above all, His boundless Mercy. In the present Chapter we have shown how important it is to know God as a motive to make us love Him. In the following Chapter we will treat of the means of acquiring this love, in other words, of instrumental perfection.

CHAPTER V.

The Moral Virtues.

If, then, the essence of Christian Perfection consists wholly in the love of God and of our neighbour, what is to be said of the moral virtues, and in the first place, of the cardinal virtues, the origin and source whence all the other moral virtues spring, and which make the soul of him that possesses them so bright and beautiful? What is to be said of the Evangelical Counsels, which our dear Redeemer recommends so strongly in the Gospel? As for example: to renounce all worldly possessions; to lead a life of celibacy; to subject ourselves voluntarily to the will of another; to confer a kindness on a friend when the rules of Charity do not make it of obligation; to pray frequently, even when present necessities do not force us to pray; to bestow alms, not only out of our abundance, but also out of that which is suitable

for our maintenance ; to fast often, even when no precept of the Church enjoins the practice ; to mortify our senses, even in regard to lawful objects ; to chastise our body in various ways ; and a thousand other things, which, though not under rigorous precept, are nevertheless demanded from us by God, being by their own nature better than their opposites, and very pleasing to Him.

Must not all these holy counsels, and exalted virtues have their share in carrying out the noble work of our perfection ?

Beyond all doubt these virtues concur powerfully in the formation of perfection, not because they constitute its substance, but as the Angelic Doctor teaches, because they are the instruments by which perfection is elaborated. St. Thomas, moreover, will have it that in the words of Christ "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me" (Matt. xix. 21), the essence of Christian Perfection is declared to be found in the mere following of Christ, whereby we become united to Him through Charity ; and he supports his opinion by the authority of St. Jerome and St. Ambrose, both of whom give this very interpretation of the words, "Follow me." The renunciation of riches is mentioned only as an instrument of perfection ; as a means, that is, for the acquirement of essential perfection, which consists in following Christ and in holy love for Him.

Cassian teaches the same, in clear and unmistakable terms. To deprive one's self of property and to divest one's self of all worldly goods, is not the pith and marrow of Christian perfection, but only a means for its attainment.

If a painter were to prepare brushes suitable for painting, and to procure brilliant colours, combining them skilfully, and mixing them with a master-hand, still no one could call him an accomplished artist,

because these things are not that at which his profession aims, but are only means thereto. The end proposed in the art of painting is to produce representations true to life: other things are but the means which the artist makes use of for this purpose. So in the case before us. The end of the Christian life and, therefore, its formal perfection, is Charity, as we have already shown. To renounce all worldly possessions, to lead a life of virginity, to subject one's self to the will of another, constitute Christian Perfection, and this too in an exalted degree, but only as instruments, which help to acquire Divine Charity.

Voluntary poverty leads us to perfection, not precisely because it deprives us of the fleeting and perishable things of this world, otherwise, as St. Jerome observes, the philosopher Crates would have been perfect, and many others who have despised these things (In Matt. iii. 19); but because poverty, in depriving us of riches, at the same time plucks from our heart all that attachment to them which is so great a hindrance to the acquisition of holy love.

Chastity, too, is perfection, but not precisely because it cuts off even such pleasures of sense as are lawful; else should we have to admit that those idolaters were perfect, of whom history tells us that they lived in entire estrangement from such enjoyments; but because, in depriving us of vile bodily pleasures; it disposes us to the pure affection of superhuman Charity.

Obedience, also, is a great perfection in the faithful, yet not precisely because it divests us of our self-will; for in that case soldiers and slaves would be perfect, since they submit their will to their officers and masters, and sometimes do so in matters that are hard and painful; but because by crushing the natural propensities of each of us to follow the lead of his own will, we are made prompt to submit ourselves to the will of God alone, and this submission is the quintessence of the love of God

The Holy Fathers speak of these moral virtues in the same strain.

St. Thomas, treating of these virtues, remarks, "A thing may be called perfect in two different senses: first, as regards what is of the very essence of its being; which is the case when the thing wants none of those parts without which it could not exist; in this sense, a man is perfect when he has a body, a soul, and that union of the two by which both are made one.

"Secondly, we may call a thing perfect as to those things which belong to the qualities only of its being, which consist in certain things foreign to its essence, but which serve either to prepare or to embellish it; in this sense a man is perfect whose limbs are cast in such or such a mould, who has a certain complexion, and particular constitution" (St. Thomas II. ii. qu. 184, art. 1 ad 2). From which St. Thomas wisely infers, that the substantial perfection of Christian life consists in that Charity which unites us to God, our last and most blessed end; while, without this, all perfection languishes and dies.

The moral virtues, on the other hand, contain nothing beyond the accidental perfection of the Christian life, inasmuch as they dispose a man to the attainment and increase of Charity, and are, so to say, its jewels. St. Jerome teaches the same doctrine in many places, when speaking of the mortification of the body by fasting, which is a real, though not more than a moral virtue. For, writing to *Celantia*, he tells her, "Be on your guard when you begin to mortify your body by abstinence and fasting, lest you imagine yourself to be perfect and a saint, for perfection does not consist in this virtue; it is only a help, a disposition, a means—suitable, certainly—for the attainment of true perfection" (Epist. ad Celant). And the same may be said of all the other moral virtues, for the same holds good in all. St. Jerome gives the like instruction to Demetrias: "Fasting is

not perfect virtue; that is, it is not a virtue which renders us perfect, but it constitutes the foundation of virtue; it is a ladder by which we ascend to the summit of that Christian perfection which dwells in Charity alone. Fasting by itself can never win for a virgin her crown of perfection and sanctity" (Epist. ad Demetr). St. Jerome, then, agrees in recognising no other perfection in the moral virtues, except that accidental perfection which they contribute, as being helps and instruments to the attainment of the essential perfection of Charity.

It is to be hoped, however, that the reader will not draw from the solid doctrine which has been laid down an unwarranted inference, capable of being a serious hindrance to that progress in the spiritual life which he desires to make. He must not think that because the Counsels and moral virtues are merely aids to perfection, and do not constitute its essence, he may set but little store upon these Counsels and virtues, and take but little pains to practise them. This would be completely to misapprehend the meaning. When it is asserted that the Counsels and virtues are only helps to attain perfection, we wish it to be understood that they are so necessary for the acquirement of that substantial perfection to which the Christian should aspire, that without their assistance it is impossible that it should ever be attained. What would you say of a student eager to perfect himself in the knowledge of philosophy, mathematics, or any other branch of science, who would tear up his books, burn pens and paper, and entirely neglect all application, under the foolish pretence that the knowledge he pants after does not consist in books, pens, paper, and study? Foolish man, you would say, most true is it that mathematics and philosophy do not consist in these things, but rather in a deep understanding and thorough possession of the principles proper to these sciences; still these things are the instruments and the means necessary for acquiring the knowledge

you covet, and consequently, without them you can never attain it. The same may be said on the point in question. The Evangelical Counsels, works of supererogation, the moral virtues, are means without which, as a common rule, perfect Charity cannot possibly be acquired, for although Almighty God by His absolute power could infuse perfect Charity without these previous dispositions, yet He is not wont to work such miracles. We must then apply ourselves to the practise of these works and virtues with the same zeal which we use for our advancement in perfection. But because this is a question of great importance, it will be well to explain how a person by means of the moral virtues and the Evangelical Counsels can attain to perfect Charity, in which, as we have so often observed, the very essence of this perfection must consist.

In all handicrafts perfection is given by one or other of two ways to the articles manufactured, either by adding something to, or taking something away from, the raw material. Thus an embroiderer, by weaving gold thread and silk into the cloth, produces a piece of tapestry. The artist, by laying colours upon his canvas, completes his painting; contrariwise, the carver, by removing small portions of wood from the rough trunk of a tree, and the sculptor by cutting from the hard block some portions of stone, give perfection to their statues.

The Christian, however, ought not to be satisfied with either one or other of these methods singly, but should put them both in practice to finish the work of perfecting his soul, and moulding it into a graceful figure worthy of a place of honour in the heavenly court. He must, in the first place, remove what may be an impediment to the infusion of perfect love. I mean he must cut away all attachments, curb disorderly affections, pluck out evil inclinations—all of which are so many obstacles in the way of perfect Charity; hindering, first, its entrance into the soul,

and then its taking full and perfect possession. Now this we bring about by means of the moral virtues and Counsels. By voluntary poverty all attachment to worldly possessions is plucked away from the heart ; by chastity the lust of pleasure is conquered ; and by obedience we root out all adhesion to our own will. Hence, St. Paul, speaking of the life of celibacy, says that he commands it not, but only counsels it, for as much as it sets us free from hindrances to the service of God.

It is by means of the moral virtues, moreover, that we bridle those disorderly passions which are the sworn enemies of holy love ; now moderating our anger, now our pride, at one time our sloth, at another gluttony, or again some other unruly appetite which is predominant in us.

But when one who is aiming at perfection sees that these obstacles are, if not wholly, at least in great part, removed, he must then take pains to introduce the positive dispositions into the soul, so that these may prepare the way to a more perfect love, and make its entrance more easy. This is accomplished by means of these very virtues and counsels, because they operate more easily when the vices opposed to them are overcome ; they root themselves more deeply in the soul, take full possession of it, and establish in it a certain agreement between the inferior and superior appetites, which are by their very nature at variance ; they beget a certain peace, quiet, repose, and purity ; the immediate dispositions for receiving from God those lights and interior movements of grace which enkindle the flame of divine love in the heart, and at times cause its fire even to consume the whole soul.

We may observe that nature itself makes use of these very means in the formation of natural substances. For example, if fire is going to produce in a piece of wood another fire like itself, it begins by driving away all obstacles to its action. If the fuel is cold, the flame of the fire warms it ; if hard, the

activity of the fire softens it ; if wet, the heat causes the moisture gradually to disperse in thin wreaths of vapour ; and when the impediments are in a great measure removed, the flame introduces an extreme dryness and a fervid heat, which are the positive and immediate dispositions for burning, followed by the flames themselves, which burst forth from the fuel and change it into a blazing fire. It seems then that nature itself would teach us what we must do to kindle in our hearts the fire of heavenly love. We must first remove from the soul, by the practice of contrary virtues, the impediments of undue attachments and raging passions ; afterwards we must introduce into it, by means of more solid virtues, the calm, the serenity, and the purity which are the immediate dispositions for lighting up in it the purest and most glowing flames of Charity.

All our good and virtuous actions, ought to be directed to purifying the heart from hurtful passions and to preserving it in peace ; for by these steps we climb to perfection, which dwells substantially in perfect Charity alone.

All this, however, is not sufficient for carrying out that work of perfection which we are endeavouring to sketch. We must in addition, make use of all the means necessary to bring it to a proper end. To remove the many hindrances in the way of attaining holy and pure love ; to implant in ourselves the positive dispositions which prepare an entrance for it ; to practise so many moral virtues and so many counsels by which both these objects are procured ; nay, to bring perfect Charity into daily action—are all things hard, difficult, and painful, and cannot be achieved except by the manifold aids of meditation, prayer, the Sacraments, examination of conscience, devotions and the like (Scaramelli, Vol. I, Section I, Article i, Chap. II).

CHAPTER VI.

Virtue in General.

We have already seen that man's Perfection consists in Charity—in the love of God and of our neighbour. We have also proved that all are bound to become perfect. That there are degrees of perfection. That the knowledge of God leads us to love Him.

We have also shown that we must remove the obstacles to Charity, viz. sin and vice. But although we may have done a great deal towards the attainment of perfection when we have removed the obstacles thereto, still, we have done nothing more than lay the foundation on which to build our edifice of Christian Perfection.

If a garden is covered with weeds and rubbish what is the first thing to be done with it? The undesirable things must be removed. The weeds must be got up root and branch. The land must be dug and cleaned.

And when this is done, the garden must be planted with flowers, fruits, and vegetables, before the owner can expect a good return for his hard labour.

In the spiritual life we have to do something after the same manner. We have to cast out the undesirable things—the obstacles to the attainment of Perfection. But when we have done this we cannot fold our arms and look on, and say that all is right now that we have got rid of sin. This would not do, we must begin to plant virtue in our souls, and to nurture it, so that it may grow and increase and bring forth fruit when the time comes.

Let us take another illustration : there is a dirty house

and the owner is about to put it into a decent, habitable condition. What must he do? He must first clean it—remove the dirt—let in the fresh air—and purify the place.

When the house is clean a person may say of it, it is a nice house now, compared to what it was. but it wants to be furnished. So it will not do for us to cast out sin; we must also practise virtue and adorn our souls.

When we have cast out sin we are, as it were, in a proper state to make a start in the Spiritual life, and in a proper way to avail of the means which God has given us for our sanctification.

And here we may point out that all Christians may be divided into two classes, viz. (1) those who are still entangled in grievous sins, or who are still held prisoners in the bonds of depraved affections and sinful occasions. To such persons it is useless to speak about practising the virtues, or Evangelical Counsels. For them the first necessity is to heal the grievous wounds of sin, and to restore the soul to a life of grace.

They must rather be directed to meditate on the great Eternal Truths, on the enormity of sin; the Sufferings and Death of our Divine Lord for man's Salvation. There are numerous and excellent books on these subjects. It is outside the scope of the present little work to write for the instruction of this class of persons. We have rather set ourselves the task of directing people who are on the road to Salvation, telling them of things which they ought to do so that they may advance in the way of perfection.

(2). Those who have set themselves free from mortal sin. Such persons must fix their eyes steadily on the perfection belonging to their state in life and employ the means for the attainment of it. Ever keeping the prize before their eyes, and ever striving to advance step by step to the highest perfection.

We have now to enquire what are the means to be employed? There must be some means, as we have already shown, for God never imposes an obligation without giving the means for attaining it. In temporal affairs we can attain no object without employing the means. It is the same in Spiritual matters. We have an object to attain, viz. Charity, and we cannot attain it without having recourse to the means.

In the last Chapter we saw in a general way that the practice of the virtues, is the great means of acquiring Charity.

The love of God shows itself in the practice of virtue, that is, in the performance of good works. St. James says, "As the body without the Spirit is dead: so also faith without works is dead" (St. James ii. 26).

The proof or trial of love is the performance of deeds" (St. Gregory, Hom. XXX. in Evan.).

We must therefore do good works. In other words we must practise the different virtues, both Theological and Moral.

Theological virtues are so called because they relate immediately, or directly to God.

They are virtues which we could never acquire by our own powers. They are infused into our souls at Baptism, and when we come to the use of reason we ought to rouse them up by making acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

When we exercise any one of the Theological virtues our act begins and ends with God. For example, when we make an act of faith it is God's word we believe in, and the reason why we believe God's word is because it is God, who is Truth itself, who speaks.

There is nothing so conducive to the love of God as to make acts of these virtues frequently during our lives.

The other virtues relate directly to God's creatures, and indirectly to God Himself; for example, the virtue of obedience relates directly to the superior, but indirectly to God. It is the superior we obey, but the reason we obey the superior is, because the superior holds in our regard the place of God.

In the following Chapters it will be necessary to treat the Theological and Moral virtues more in detail.

In the present Chapter we will confine ourselves to explaining the nature of virtue, the different kinds of virtues, and the relations between them.

Virtue in general may be briefly defined as "a habit of right conduct," or as "a habit that is operative of good." St. Augustine defines Virtue as "a good quality of the mind whereby a man lives rightly, and which no one uses wrongly, which God works in us without our aid."

The last clause, however, as St. Thomas observes, does not belong to virtue generally, but serves to distinguish infused from acquired virtue.

Virtue implies a permanent disposition. Restraint upon a particular occasion does not necessarily imply virtue. Virtue is in the intellect and in the will and combines both in its exercise. Virtue then signifies at the same time a power and a facility, enabling us to do good works with cheerfulness.

A habit is "a quality of the mind permanently determining it according to its nature or operation." To the words determining or inclining it according to its nature or operation we must, in the case of virtue, superadd the idea of good.

Habit is from the Latin *habere*, to have permanently. A habit is a facility which we get from repeated acts. Repeated acts cause an impression, for instance, if a man is accustomed to take his dinner at a certain hour every day, when that time comes he begins to feel that he wants his dinner.

The mind and will also can get a certain bent by repeated acts. Habits have effects upon the intellect and will. From this it is evident that great care should be taken to instil good habits into the minds of the young in the course of their education.

The young mind can be inclined to virtue just as a young sapling can be made to bend in any direction that is desirable.

It is too late to bend the tree when it is grown up. It is also too late to form good impressions upon the mind and will when repeated acts of vice have produced their effects and given it a wrong bent.

It is therefore of the greatest importance to instil into the minds of the young, habits of Prayer, Truth, Temperance, Reverence for God and the things of Religion, etc. Most people have knowledge enough. It is not knowledge, as a rule, that is wanting, but the will to do what is morally right.

Virtue is acquired or infused. Acquired virtue comes from ourselves, and is acquired by repeated acts on our part.

Infused virtue comes from God, and is deposited in the soul without concurrence on our part.

The object of acquired virtue is what we can do ourselves.

The object of infused virtues is what God works in us.

The virtues which can be only infused are called Supernatural. The others are known as acquired virtues.

Every virtue may be said to give a *power* and a *facility*. Supernatural virtue primarily gives a power. Acquired virtue primarily gives a facility.

An illustration will best help us to understand this point—a man knows nothing about digging, he begins to dig—after a time he acquires a facility from the repeated acts, later on he finds that he is able to dig.

He has thus got to be able to dig, and the labour has become easy to him.

In the same way, every time a person resists a temptation he gets a facility, and in the course of time gets a power of resisting temptations which a man has not who is not so accustomed to fight against temptation.

We have now to inquire what virtues are infused, and what virtues are acquired?

It is of faith, that the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity are infused.

It is agreed amongst Theologians, but it is not of faith, that the Four Cardinal Virtues are infused.

The other virtues are to be taken account of, and judged as they arise. They may be infused, or acquired, or both.

Take an illustration: one man earns a hundred pounds, another man gets a present of the same amount, while a third man earns fifty pounds and gets a present of fifty more. All three have the same amount, but they have acquired it in different ways.

Theologians teach that besides the infused virtues there are given to man the Gifts of the Holy Ghost for his comfort and sanctification. It is not of faith that they are infused, but St. Thomas teaches that these gifts are given by God to every just man, and that they are most conducive to his eternal salvation: moreover they are the special aids which render the Christian man capable of extraordinary and heroic acts. The general opinion is that the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are a part of the life of every good Christian, and that they are given at Baptism. Whether they are distinct from the moral infused virtues is not agreed upon. They are like suggestions.

Supernatural virtue gives the power of acting rightly; then the Gifts of the Holy Ghost come in and give a facility.

An illustration will help us to understand this

point: take a boy at school, he is put a question, the boy at first hesitates, and fails to answer the question, he gets a hint which puts him on the right track and then he explains everything to the satisfaction of his questioner.

The Theological and infused Moral Virtues are concomitants of sanctifying grace, and every increase of grace gives an increase of infused virtues.

We must now explain the connection between the different virtues.

The Theological Virtues are the fountains and roots of the "Dona" or Gifts of the Holy Ghost. The Dona while they are like streams springing from the Theological Virtues become in turn the fountains and roots of the Moral Virtues. The Moral Virtues put into practice the good works which the Gifts of the Holy Ghost inspire man with a holy desire and inclination to do.

In the relationship of all the Virtues with one another we are always to regard the Theological Virtues as the fountain-heads from which all the others in rotation flow. All other Virtues can be traced up to them, and they come directly from God. God is therefore the beginning and the end of all Virtue.

It remains to say a few words about the Evangelical Counsels. Our Divine Lord in the Gospel has recommended to His followers the practice of voluntary Poverty, perpetual Chastity, and entire Obedience. These recommendations of Our Divine Lord are called Evangelical Counsels.

They are called Counsels because they are not of strict precept. He has only advised and recommended the practise of them as a means of greater perfection.

Voluntary Poverty is a free renunciation of the goods of fortune, in order to be less distracted in striving for those that are eternal. "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor,

and thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come, follow me " (Matt. xix. 21).

Perpetual Chastity is a free and perpetual renunciation, not only of all impure pleasure, but even of marriage, in order that we may render undivided service to God.

"Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord : but I give counsel He that giveth his virgin in marriage doth well : and he that giveth her not, doth better " (1 Cor. vii. 25, 28).

"If any one shall say that the marriage state is to be preferred to the state of virginity, or of celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain, in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony, let him be anathema " (Council of Trent, session 24, Can. 10).

Entire Obedience is a renunciation of one's own will, in order to do the Divine Will more surely under a superior who represents God.

By Voluntary Poverty all attachment to the riches of the world is plucked away from the heart.

By Chastity the lust of pleasure is conquered.

Obedience roots out all adhesion to our own will and thus enables us to do the Will of God more easily.

The Evangelical Counsels remove obstacles and in this way are a great help to the attainment of the highest perfection.

CHAPTER VII.

The Virtue of Faith.

Faith is "a supernatural gift of God which enables us to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed, because God is the very truth, and can neither deceive nor be deceived."

An act of Divine Faith is the undoubting assent given to revealed truths, not because of the evidence which can be produced for them, but simply because they are revealed by God.

The truths which Faith accepts are not evident in themselves, or if evident, as is the case with the truths of natural religion, are not accepted with Divine Faith because so evident.

Divine Faith must be entire and it must exclude all doubt.

It is a supernatural gift because it does not in any way belong to our nature but is given us by God. Some things are natural to us, for instance, it is natural to man to see. Other things such as sanctifying Grace, Faith, etc., are supernatural gifts bestowed upon us by Almighty God. We could never acquire them by our own natural powers.

Faith is altogether different from knowledge derived from experience, and from knowledge derived from human authority. Faith is a free gift which God infuses into our souls when we are baptized.

God bestows this great supernatural gift upon us, but he expects us to use it by making acts of this virtue: otherwise it is a dead useless Faith. If a man were a very clever painter, but never exercised his art, of what use were his skill?

We speak of Faith in this Chapter as a supernatural

gift of God to man which man must make use of for the attainment of his supernatural end, the possession of God Himself in life eternal.

Faith is necessary to salvation ; for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. xi. 6).

Man is intended for a supernatural end. He must know this end, otherwise he could not direct his actions so as to reach it. This knowledge is revealed knowledge and cannot be attained by natural reason.

No man can be saved who does not at least believe, and with Divine Faith, that "God exists, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him" (Heb. xi. 6).

Faith is necessary, but it is not sufficient for salvation unless it is perfected by Charity. "If I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing" (1 Cor. xiii. 2).

Our Faith must be a Faith which worketh by Charity, as opposed to a Faith without Charity which is dead, "As the body without the spirit is dead : so also faith without works is dead" (St. James ii. 26).

The virtue of Faith is destroyed by a single act of disbelief in any revealed truth.

Faith as an infused virtue is imparted to children as one of the effects of the Sacrament of Baptism—children are as rational beings capable of the infused virtues, although they remain incapable of the exercise of them until they attain the use of reason—a man in sleep may have the capacity of Faith though he cannot exercise it till he wakes.

The capacity is one thing, the actual exercise another.

It is evident that everyone ought to set great value upon Faith, and to make frequent acts of this great virtue ; "for by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves for it is the gift of God" (Eph. ii. 8).

CHAPTER VIII.

Hope.

Faith alone will not save us, we must also have Hope, and Charity.

In a general sense Hope means an ardent desire, accompanied with a confident expectation of acquiring some absent and possible good.

Hope is an act of the will.

Desire alone is not Hope. Desire is a movement of the will towards some good which is absent but not possessed. It considers the good apart from the ease or difficulty of obtaining it.

A man may ardently desire a thing, and yet despair of obtaining it; as the poor man desires riches, the sick man desires health, and a person condemned to die, desires life, though none of them have any hope of obtaining what they wish for. The desire of any good must be accompanied with a confident expectation of acquiring it in order to constitute Hope.

Hope aims at an object which it is difficult and arduous to reach, and implies a certain effort and eagerness of the soul, which aims at overcoming the hindrances that thwart its attainment of the good hoped for.

The farmer hopes for a plentiful harvest by his labour and toil. The merchant hopes to attain riches, by his diligence and industry. The soldier hopes to gain conquest and glory by his courage and bravery. The Christian hopes for eternal salvation with the help and assistance of God, enabling him to overcome all difficulties, and to use the means which God has given to him to enable him to gain eternal life.

The will desires different objects which it considers

good, and the more excellent any object is the more the will desires to be possessed of it. Now eternal happiness is the greatest good man can attain, and he ought therefore to desire it more ardently than anything else. "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and His Justice" (Matt. vi. 33).

"What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul" (Mark viii. 36).

Hope is a virtue, that is, a good habit of the soul, which gives a facility in performing acts pleasing to God.

Christian Hope is a supernatural virtue, by which we expect with a firm confidence the possession of God, and the graces necessary to gain that end.

Divine Hope is a supernatural gift of God, by which we firmly trust that God will give us eternal life and all the means necessary to obtain it if we do what he requires of us.

It does not belong to the nature of man like other gifts which God has bestowed on him, such as sight, speech, etc. It is a pure gift of God's goodness, to which of ourselves we have no right or title.

It is a Divine virtue, because we have it not of ourselves, but from God, who by His grace infuses it into our souls. "The hope of them that trust in God is a mercy of God who by His grace moves us to hope" (St. Prosper. In Ps. cxxx.).

It is the teaching of our holy Faith, that the obtaining of salvation is above the natural powers of man, that he cannot of his own strength make the least step towards it, and that our whole dependence must be upon God by whose assistance alone, through the merits of Christ, we can be enabled to attain it; so that it is from Him we are to expect both our salvation itself and the necessary means for obtaining it.

The primary object of Hope is God Himself—Eternal happiness—The possession of God—The Beatific Vision.

The secondary object of Hope is the means of sal-

vation offered by God through the merits of Jesus Christ, namely, repentance, forgiveness of sin, sanctifying grace, good works, and final perseverance. These are supernatural gifts, and must come to us from God through the merits of Christ.

The motives on which Hope is based are some of the most essential perfections of God, namely, His Fidelity to His promises, His Power, and His Goodness.

God has promised Eternal life to him who, keeping the Commandments, shall persevere in grace unto death. "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved" (Matt. x. 22).

God has also promised to afford to everyone the help needed for keeping His Commandments. "I say to you, ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke xi. 9, 10).

God has promised Eternal life and the means to obtain it, and He cannot be unfaithful in fulfilling His promises because of His Infinite Veracity. He Himself assures us that "heaven and earth shall pass, but My words shall not pass" (Matt. xxiv. 35). These promises of God ought to fill our hearts with Hope.

God has promised us Eternal life, and as He is all Powerful He is able to give it to us. "Our God is in heaven, He hath done all things whatsoever He would" (Ps. cxiii. 3).

Not alone is God able to grant us Eternal life, but by His infinite Goodness He is most desirous to help us, and to give us all the necessary graces to enable us to gain Eternal life. The Power, Goodness, and Fidelity of God to His promises are the motives on which our Hope is grounded.

The first property of Hope is that its reliance be on God alone. "The Lord is my firmament, my refuge, and my deliverer. My God is my helper, and in Him will I put my trust" (Ps. xvii. 2, 3).

“Rely not on thy wisdom, virtue, or talent, but on God alone, for He it is Who directs thy footsteps in thy pilgrimage to thy heavenly home” (St Jerome, *adversus Pelagianos*, Lib. III.).

The second property of Hope is a certain expectation of everlasting life, as well as the means necessary for its attainment. Christian Hope is grounded on the Fidelity of Almighty God to His promises and must therefore be steady in its affections. It cannot waver in its expectation of the good in store for it.

The third property of Hope is the union of a wholesome fear with a confident expectation of Eternal life and the means to obtain it.

Virtue is in the golden mean. We cannot insist too much on this point.

A well regulated union of fear and confidence gives us, as it were, the proper balance.

Fr. Scaramelli explains this property of Hope so beautifully that we cannot abstain from quoting his words in full—“The third property of hope consists in the union of a wholesome fear with the assured expectation of supernatural blessings. As Solomon says: ‘In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence’ (Proverbs xiv. 26). And the Book of Ecclesiasticus exhorts them that fear the Lord to hope in Him, implying thereby that godly fear predisposes to hope, which, in its turn, by no means excludes holy fear (Ecclus. xi. 19). So true is this, that to induce us to join hope and fear, the Psalmist says: ‘The Lord takes delight in those that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy’ (Ps. cxlvi. 11), that is to say, the Lord loves such as know how to unite the two sentiments of supernatural hope and fear.”

Nor should this surprise us, for these two affections, though distinct, are not opposed to each other, but can well co-exist in the same heart, since they are awakened by different motives.

Hope is stirred up within us by God’s infallible promises, and by His goodness ever ready to shower down gifts upon us; and by such comforting motives

is it encouraged to aspire to the enjoyment of the Sovereign Good.

Fear, on the other hand, is produced by the consideration of our own nothingness, insufficiency, weakness, faults, shortcomings, and inborn propensities, which incline us to evil; all which motives inspire the soul with distrust of self, and keep us in humility and lowly-mindedness.

Hope raises us to God, fear makes us shrink within ourselves. The former virtue spurs on the soul to action, the latter renders it cautious and watchful.

"He that hopes without fearing," says St. Augustine, "will grow heedless on account of excessive security; he that fears, but hopes not, falls into discouragement by dejection of soul, and runs the risk of being thrown headlong into the slough of despair. O holy hope! thou enablest us to bear everything with patience and meekness. Wherefore brethren," continues the Holy Doctor, "love this virtue, strive to obtain and preserve it, yet so that it be not dissociated from divine fear, lest, devoid of fear, ye fall into heedlessness or, failing in hope, ye yield to pusillanimity and lowness of heart, with danger of falling into the abyss" (Serm. 10, ad Fratres in Ermo).

Thus may the reader perceive how needful it is to blend together both these sentiments in our heart, so that each may serve as a counterpoise to the other, and may help us to advance with courage, yet with caution, on the road to heaven.

St. Bernard inculcates the same spiritual lesson when treating of these two affections. He observes, that "fear of God's judgments, apart from hope, casts us down into the pit of despair; while indiscreet hope, unmixed with a reasonable fear, engenders a hurtful security" (Serm. 6, in Cantica). Whereas, by the union of these two virtues, the soul is rendered steady and safe in the way of salvation and perfection; for hope strengthens it to go forward, while fear

makes it take heed to its steps lest it fall into some vain presumption.

A ship, to make its way in safety across the seas, requires wind to propel it, and ballast to give it weight and to cause it to have the needful draught of water. If the wind fail, the vessel lies a log on the sea ; when not properly ballasted, its own lightness exposes it to be capsized. So, too, a devout person, in order to go to God safely, has need of the breath of hope to propel him towards good, and must also be steadied by fear, as with ballast, making him sink deep into the feeling of his own miseries, and thus keeping him in lowly sentiments of humility. If a man be wanting in the ballast of filial fear, his own unsteadiness and vanity will drive him to make shipwreck by some grievous sin.

If the favourable wind of hope fail him, he will remain motionless and without energy, and will lose all power for any good deed. But if he have both virtues, hope to push him onwards, and fear to make him preserve his balance, he will make sail in all safety towards his heavenly country.

In a word, hope must not cast out fear, but render the soul humble, moderate, and calm ; fear, in its turn, must not deaden hope, or deprive it of its firmness, but must communicate to it modesty, prudence, and circumspection" (Scaramelli, Vol. IV, Treatise iv, Article 2, Chapter IV).

Great advantages come to us from the exercise of Hope. It enlarges the heart. It enables us to fulfil with cheerfulness all the commandments of God. It fills us with a distrust of ourselves, and with a perfect confidence in the power, goodness, and mercy of God, and this is the most necessary disposition of a soul for obtaining favours from God.

It gives us great strength to walk with courage in God's service ; because we know that with His assistance nothing can be difficult or impossible for us. "The eyes of the Lord behold all the earth, and give

strength to those who with a perfect heart trust in Him" (2 Paral. xvi. 9).

Hope is always required in prayer. "But if any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (St. James i. 5-7).

We have many notable examples of this in Sacred Scripture. Those who approached Our Divine Lord and made their supplications to Him with confidence had their petitions granted to them.

We should exercise Hope when despair and distrust, or dejection strive to make an entrance into our hearts.

Hope is also to be exercised in times of temptation and tribulation. It is a virtue that will enlarge our hearts, it will fill us with confidence, and make us run in the way of the Commandments of God.

Hope in God is a part of the duty of every Christian. By Divine Hope we honour the Fidelity of God to His sacred promises. We honour His Power,—His Goodness,—and His infinite Mercy.

Hope is a virtue that is frequently lost sight of by many Christians. We have treated it at considerable length so that it may be better known and practised. Every Christian ought to make frequent acts of Hope. These acts will increase the virtue in the soul.

CHAPTER IX.

The Virtue of Charity.

Charity is a Divine virtue infused into our souls, by which we love God above all things, and our neighbour as ourselves, for God's sake.

It is a virtue divinely infused by which we give ourselves up to God as the Sovereign Good, that by doing His will we may please Him and be united with Him.

This description sets forth the object and the substance of the act of Charity. The object is our union with God; the substance of the act is a loving gift of ourselves to God.

Divine Charity is a Theological virtue because it comes from God and relates immediately to Him.

It is an infused virtue, "the Charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given us" (Rom. v. 5).

Considered as a habit, Charity is an infused virtue which elevates the soul and thus enables and disposes it to bring forth the acts proper to Charity.

Charity may be perfect or imperfect. Perfect Charity justifies man by its own efficacy. Imperfect Charity justifies man only in the Sacrament of Penance.

Perfect Charity admits of three degrees: (1) Love of God above all things which grievously displease Him. (2) Love of God above all things which only slightly displease Him. (3) Love of God even above such things as do not displease Him, but still are less pleasing than others.

The first degree excludes all mortal sin and is necessary and sufficient for salvation.

The second degree excludes venial sin and belongs to Christian perfection.

The third is the summit of perfection to which no command obliges us, but Divine grace invites us.

Charity is the most excellent of all virtues ; it is also their *form* or soul ; because no other virtue can be meritorious of Eternal life, unless it be animated by, and proceed from the motive of Charity. Hence St. Paul assures us, that without this virtue nothing can be of any avail to us. “ If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not Charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing ” (1 Cor. xiii. 1-3).

There are many motives why we ought to love God. (1) God is infinitely perfect, and most excellent in His nature. (2) God is infinitely good to us. God has created us. He has redeemed and sanctified us. (3) He is the very end of our being. We were made for God to be united with Him for ever. (4) God has supreme dominion over us. We are His creatures. He has therefore a perfect right to lay upon us whatever command He pleases, and He commands us to love Him. “ And this commandment we have from God, that he, who loveth God, love also his brother ” (1 John iv. 21.)

CHAPTER X.

The Intellectual Virtues.

Intellectual virtues are habits which perfect the mind. Wisdom, Knowledge, and Understanding are the principal intellectual virtues.

Wisdom is a virtue by which our mind sees effects in their highest causes. It reaches to the conclusions of all sciences, as well as the principles from which they flow.

Knowledge is a virtue by which our mind sees things in their effects, in their consequences, and in their closest bearings on the human race.

Man, perfected by knowledge, values, judges, discusses, analyses, foresees; he traces effects to their causes, consequences to their principles, and by chains of reasoning, forms systems which lead to important discoveries, as well in the material as in the moral order.

Understanding is a habit which perfects our mind, and renders it capable of comprehending the principles of things, such as they are in themselves, abstracting from their consequences.

All these three virtues perfect our mind. The moral virtues, as we shall see, perfect our will.

Everyone is bound according to his abilities to acquire the intellectual virtues. Man is bound to acquire all the information necessary for the fulfilment of his duties towards God, towards himself, and towards his neighbour. Ignorance is an evil, and God expects people to use the talents which He has given to them, if they leave them lie idle God will make them render an account of them.

CHAPTER XI.

The Moral Virtues. The Four Cardinal Virtues.

The Moral Virtues are virtues which perfect our will. They deal with our inclinations and propensities.

These Virtues may be practised from mere natural motives, so practised they are fruitless for salvation. In order that the Moral Virtues may be meritorious of eternal life they must derive their motive from Faith, and thus become supernatural. Every other virtue must spring from and be directed by the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

Four of the Moral Virtues, viz. Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice, are called Cardinal Virtues because they are as it were the hinges on which the other Moral Virtues depend or hang.

All the other Moral Virtues can be traced back to one or other of the four Cardinal Virtues. In this way there are four groups of Moral Virtues, viz. the group belonging to Prudence, the Fortitude group, the Temperance group, and the Justice group. They are so named, according to St. Thomas, on account of their generality and importance. They are, as it were, the heads of the other virtues. Thus religion belongs to Justice because it gives God His due. Chastity comes under Temperance because it puts a restraint on certain passions ; and so of the others.

By Prudence the ignorance of the intellect is removed and we are thus enabled to know what to desire or avoid.

By Fortitude we are urged on to duty when difficulty stands in the way.

Temperance restrains us, when passion excites us to what is wrong, and makes us moderate our natural inclinations.

Justice gives every one his due.

Prudence, Fortitude, and Temperance consider man in his relations to himself. Justice on the other hand considers man in his relations to his fellow man. It supposes a complete separation, and separate individual rights. "And if a man love justice, her labours have great virtues; for she teacheth temperance, and prudence, and justice, and fortitude, which are such things as men can have nothing more profitable in life" (Wisdom, viii. 7).

St. Gregory compares these four great virtues to four streams irrigating and thereby fertilizing a field, because he says while by these four virtues the heart is cooled and refreshed all the heat of temporal desires is tempered and soothed (Moral 1, 2, C. 36).

CHAPTER XII.

The Virtue of Prudence.

Prudence is from the Latin *providere*, to see before one. "Prudence is a virtue of the intellect by which we know in each occurring act that which is right and that which is wrong" (Lessius). It is a virtue of the intellect, the other moral virtues are in the will. It is a practical knowledge of what ought to be done and what ought to be avoided.

The office of Prudence is to show us in all our actions, the end to which we ought to tend, and the means suitable for the attainment of that end.

Prudence is the criterion and measure of every virtue, and is consequently itself a virtue and the mistress of all the virtues.

Prudence is a most necessary virtue. It is commanded us by God Himself. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is prudence" (Proverbs ix. 10).

Prudence acts on all the faculties of the soul. It obliges these faculties to help it in attaining its end. The memory at the command of Prudence brings forward the experience of others and one's own experience so that one may be directed to do what is right. It enlightens the understanding in regard to the end we ought to desire. Prudence guides the will to worthy operations.

As a rule the most virtuous are the most prudent, because our moral actions have an influence on our mental judgments. A man is prudent when he can form prudent judgments in his own work. No one could reasonably expect a poor labourer to form prudent judgments in the work of a bishop, or in that of a military commander.

Prudence supposes (1) Certitude of judgment; (2) Solicitude and diligence of enquiry, but it does not of necessity exclude error of the will.

The sin, however, will be all the greater in the case of the man who acts against Prudence than in the case of the man who acts without it.

Ignorance is an excusing element in the latter, and knowledge an aggravating element in the former. From this it is not to be supposed that knowledge is a hindrance rather than a help in man's spiritual and supernatural life; it only proves that man's freedom of will is not impaired by even the most profound knowledge and understanding. But the prudent man is much more likely to do what is right than is the man who is not possessed of this very important virtue.

The prudent man enquires with diligence, judges with caution and is consequently much encouraged and helped to do what is right, when the occasion arises for the discharge of any important duty.

The following axioms of philosophers "know thyself," "look to the end," "hasten slowly," etc., are nothing more than acts of the prudent man's judgment in everyday life.

Prudence may be either infused or acquired or both. As an infused virtue it differs from Faith which is also a virtue of the intellect in this, that it is practical whereas Faith is theoretical.

Christian Prudence supposes Faith, for it is through Faith that it finds out the principles and truths through which man in his concrete acts knows what are the things that as a Christian he should do or avoid.

Foresight, circumspection, discernment, and docility spring from Prudence and belong to this group of virtues.

Foresight guesses the result and knows beforehand the means to succeed.

Circumspection weighs everything attentively, and leaves nothing to chance.

Discernment chooses the wisest part after having examined the pros and cons.

Docility leads us to distrust ourselves and to follow the counsels of the wise.

Sin may be committed against Prudence as against every other virtue by excess and by defect. Hence the well-known axiom, "*In medio stat virtus*," "*Virtue lies in the golden mean.*" But excess of Prudence, rarely, if ever, reaches grave matter: it consists in either undue solicitude regarding the present, undue anxiety regarding the future, or an inordinate desire for temporal goods. This latter passion, however, which St. Paul calls "*cupiditas*," is sedulously to be guarded against, for "*Radix omnium malorum est cupiditas*," "*Avarice is the root of all evil.*"

The sins of defect against Prudence are precipitancy, which is opposed to enquiry: inconsideration or want of thought, which is opposed to judgment: inconstancy,

which is opposed to firmness: negligence, which is opposed to vigilance.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Virtue of Fortitude.

Fortitude in a general sense is the resolution and effort which are required in the performance of every virtuous act.

It is the support of all other virtues. As the root of a tree supports the trunk, branches, fruit, and flowers, so Fortitude sustains, and is the strength of the whole system of moral and Christian virtues.

In its strict and specific signification it is "a virtue which enables us to overcome all the obstacles that oppose us in the practice of good and the endurance of evil." It enables us to endure any hardship or persecution, rather than abandon our duty. In this strict sense it gives a special firmness of mind which is required for sustaining or repelling the difficulties which are sure to accompany the discharge of certain Christian duties.

It is a virtue which helps us to keep our reason right in very difficult circumstances, such as death, or martyrdom.

Fortitude enables us to overcome the dangers and difficulties which come in the way of our duty towards God, towards our neighbour, and towards ourselves. It helps us to bear all sorts of persecutions, and afflictions, rather than offend God. It is a virtue that is necessary for every Christian. The performance of our duty is Fortitude.

Christian Fortitude especially reveals itself on the occasion of danger of death, for at that solemn moment, everyone will admit that it is most difficult to retain the

standard of right reason—and yet even death itself must, when the occasion arises, be accepted by the Christian man rather than that he should deny his religion or any of the revealed truths connected with it.

The Fortitude needed for martyrdom is the most excellent of all fortitudes: for, “Greater love than this no man hath than that he lay down his life for his brother”: the brother for whom martyrdom is endured is Christ the Saviour—the Exemplar—the Judge, and the Eternal reward.

The effects of martyrdom are (1) Sanctifying grace, (2) the remission of the guilt and punishment of sin, (3) the aureola of special glory which is reserved by God for those who shed their blood for Christ.

The conditions of martyrdom are, (1) the infliction of death in hatred of the religion of Jesus Christ, (2) its acceptation on account of revealed truth, (3) that death be willingly accepted, (4) that at least attrition be had by the victim if he happens to be in mortal sin at the time.

Fortitude holds a middle place between temerity and audacity, and has for its formal object or motive the moderation of what is done; whereas all other virtues have for their motive the honesty of the acts themselves in so far as they are virtues.

Sin is committed against Fortitude by excess or by defect. Rashness, audacity, and presumption are sins against this virtue by way of excess.

Fear, cowardice, pusillanimity, sloth, and human respect are sins by way of defect.

The virtues which spring from Fortitude, and which belong to the Fortitude group are, Confidence, Courage, Magnanimity, Magnificence, Perseverance, and Patience.

Confidence makes one believe himself able to encounter dangers and to support the difficulties which will be met with in reasonable undertakings.

Magnanimity inclines one to perform works worthy of great honour.

Magnificence, sometimes called munificence, which is a branch of Magnanimity, leads one to perform works of

external splendour, such as building a church, or endowing an hospital, for the glory of God.

Perseverance, helps man to do good to the end, in spite of all the vexations with which his path is strewn.

Patience regulates grief or sorrow according to right reason.

To acquire this great virtue we must imitate our Divine Lord, the Apostles, the Martyrs, and the Saints.

We read in the life of St. Clement of Ancyra that the Emperor Diocletian placed before him the instruments of his martyrdom to terrify him—and on the other side a quantity of gold, silver, and precious stones to allure him, and said to the Saint, “Make your choice—if you persist in loving your God, see the death that awaits you ; but if you deny him all the riches before you shall be yours.” The martyr drawing a deep and indignant sigh, protested with the Apostle that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. viii. 38, 39).

CHAPTER XIV.

The Virtue of Temperance.

The word Temperance in a wide sense is equivalent to restraint or moderation ; but it is commonly used for moderation in certain strong appetites which are concerned with the preservation of the individual or of the race.

These are the appetites indulged through the senses of taste and touch. In this sense Temperance may be

defined, "that special virtue which restrains the animal appetite of man in the delectations of taste and touch."

It is a virtue which restrains our sensual inclinations and desires, that they may not allure us from virtue. "Refrain yourselves from carnal desires which war against the soul" (1 Pet. ii. 11).

These desires, it may be remarked, are in themselves and when used in moderation not forbidden—but they are dangerous on account of their vehemence, and when indulged in lead to sin and ultimately to a habit of sin, which, when once contracted, can be overcome only with great difficulty.

Two classes of virtuous acts therefore are embraced in the Cardinal virtue of Temperance, viz. chastity controlling the sense of touch, and temperance controlling the sense of taste.

Temperance is a virtue which makes man moderate in the use of the pleasures of this life.

The office of Temperance is not to deny to man all sorts of pleasures, but to regulate their use in accordance with right reason and the law of God.

The form of Temperance which regulates the sense of taste is generally restricted to mean moderation in the use of intoxicants—moderation in eating is of course also a moral virtue and a Christian precept—but it is in the use of intoxicating drink that the virtue of Temperance is most sedulously to be cherished and encouraged.

Total abstinence is necessary for some, but only a counsel for others—but drunkenness is for all a mortal sin.

Those who cannot be moderate or who know that drink, even in moderation, is a dangerous and a proximate occasion of mortal sin, are bound to abstain altogether.

The obligation of practising the virtue of Temperance is clear from the life of our Divine Lord and the Saints.

It is written in almost every page of Sacred Scripture.

Fasting and abstinence, sobriety, chastity, bashfulness, modesty, humility, meekness, and clemency belong to the Temperance group of virtues.

Chastity restrains within the bounds of moderation the inclination to carnal pleasure.

Bashfulness is a virtuous shame, inspiring an avoidance and abhorrence of looks, familiarities, and actions capable of wounding chastity.

Modesty maintains order in one's inward and outward movements.

Humility is a virtue which from a true knowledge of our miseries, keeps us little in our own eyes, and makes us refer all the good that we do to God.

Humility is partly in the understanding and partly in the will. It is in the understanding because it is founded on a knowledge of ourselves—of our sinfulness, nothingness, and insufficiency.

Meekness drives away anger and impatience, settles the soul in peace, and disposes us to treat our neighbour kindly at all times.

Clemency tempers justice with mercy as far as reason permits.

Intemperance, drunkenness, gluttony, and impurity are sins against the Cardinal virtue of Temperance.

CHAPTER XV.

The Virtue of Justice.

The Cardinal Virtues, of which we have spoken, immediately regard man himself and the regulation of his internal appetites and passions.

But there are other virtues which direct man in his relations with other men. Among these latter, Justice holds the first place.

In a broad sense Justice has a number of meanings,

(1) Justice means a collection of all virtues. (2) It is taken to mean the state of sanctifying grace: Sanctity in general: Righteousness: Any just act.

In these two senses it is frequently used in Sacred Scripture. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill" (Matt. v. 6).

The wise man says that "the justice of the righteous shall deliver them" (Prov. xi. 6).

Our Divine Lord says, "Unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. v. 20).

"It becometh us to fulfil all justice" (Matt. iii. 15).

In this broad sense Justice is taken to signify good works—including words and thoughts as well as deeds.

(3) It is taken to mean Legal, Distributive, and Vindictive Justice.

(4) Commutative Justice with which we have here most concern.

In a strict sense Justice is not alone a virtue, but as we have seen, it is one of the Cardinal Virtues and is defined by Theologians as "a virtue inclining or helping the will to preserve uninjured his just right to every one."

It is a firm and abiding resolve to give to each that which is his own.

It is a virtue which leads us to give to everyone his due.

The remote material object of the virtue of Justice is the neighbour's right—the "*Jus alienum*"—and the various things—"res"—to which he has a right—"Jus."

The proximate material object consists in the actions by which that right or *jus* is recognized and rectified when violated. These are (1) not to violate, (2) to give, (3) to repair when violated.

The formal object or the reason for doing Justice as a virtue consists, (1) in the recognition of the neighbour's right to what is his own, (2) the obligation of giving to everyone that which is his own.

That individual man has a right to certain things is so axiomatic and so much in accordance with right reason

and common sense that there is no need to prove it. The human race in every part of the world admit it and act upon it.

In matters of Justice we are as much bound to the stranger as to our own friends. Justice in a strict sense binds us to *everyone*.

Justice is sub-divided into (1) "Legal Justice," which orders a man's actions to the common good, in which he himself shares.

(2) Distributive Justice, which inclines superiors to a just distribution of burdens and advantages among their subjects.

(3) Vindictive Justice, which metes out just punishment to delinquents.

(4) Commutative Justice, which is justice in the strict sense, consists in giving to everyone his strict right.

Commutative Justice alone involves the obligation of restitution.

Legal, Distributive, and Vindictive Justice involve the obligation of restitution only in as far as commutative or strict Justice is violated.

There are a great number of virtues annexed to Justice. Of these, some regard what is called a "Legal debt," others regard what is called a "Moral debt."

The former may be claimed as a debt by reason of the extrinsic claim of Natural Law. The other supposes only an obligation, in the loose sense of intrinsic becomingness arising from gratitude for past favours, or from politeness according to our position in life.

These two classes of virtuous acts are so closely connected with Justice though not identical with it that a brief explanation of them is necessary in order to complete our exposition of this important subject.

The virtues annexed to Justice and which imply a moral debt are principally gratitude, veracity, liberality, affability, kindness, and mercy.

The meaning of these different virtuous acts presents no difficulty.

The virtues annexed to Justice which regard a "legal debt" are more difficult to understand and require more explanation.

The acts of "legal debt" which may be claimed as a right by one person from another are founded on the intrinsic force of natural right and are of so binding a nature that the ordinary claims of the virtue of Justice itself must in many instances yield to their demands.

Of this kind are the Piety, Reverence, and Obedience, which children owe to their parents, citizens to the constituted authorities of their country, and which the different grades of society owe to one another according to their respective positions in religious or civil life.

Piety takes its title from the superiority of the claimant—Observance from his dignity—and Obedience from authority and dignity combined.

Piety includes respect and love. These two obligations must go hand in hand, for respect without love may be only a mere formality, and love without respect may be no more than a passion,—while both combined form the most excellent tribute the human soul can pay a superior being. Such above all others is the respect and love which good dutiful children have for their parents.

Why then should we respect our parents? For this reason: that just as God, because He is the first principle of our creation is entitled to our respect more than any human being whatsoever, so our parents being after God the authors of our existence are entitled to most respect from us after God.

We should also love our parents for the same reason as that for which we should respect them, viz. because of our dependence on them for our existence, and also, because of their great love for us.

There is no labour which good parents would not undergo, no danger which they would not risk, no sacrifice which they would not make to promote the happiness and welfare of their children.

The love of the parent and particularly the love of the

mother for the child is the deepest, the tenderest, the most delicate, and the most ineradicable feeling of the human heart.

The virtue of Observance consists in the recognition by the child in the parent, and by the citizen in the lawful authorities of his country, of a certain superiority, of a directing and guiding influence which he by reason of his inferiority does not himself possess. This authority is given by God, and as no sane man can say he is free from dependence on God, so no child is at liberty to disregard the wise counsel of the parent.

The last obligation springing from "legal debt" is Obedience, which in so far as it regards the child's duty towards the parent consists in service as well as in submission. Not alone should the child do what the parent desires in all lawful directions, but he should also assist him in his necessities, provide for him in his illness, comfort him in his old age, and console him in all his afflictions.

The vices opposed to justice are superstition, fanaticism, usury, prodigality, irreligion, disobedience, ingratitude, falsehood, and enmity.

Superstition is a belief in things which are not proper objects of worship and which thereby falsifies the worship due to God.

Fanaticism is an extravagant notion of religion which distorts it.

Usury is a vice by which the rights of others in regard to their goods is overstepped.

Prodigality is extravagance in expenditure in regard to one's own goods. It is excessive expenditure of one's substance, or waste.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Great Value we ought to set on
Perfection.

“Wherefore I wished, and understanding was given me, and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me. And I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her. Neither did I compare unto her any precious stone, for all gold in comparison of her is as a little sand, and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay. I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light, for her light cannot be put out” (Wisdom vii. 7-10).

The true wisdom which all of us ought to desire is Christian perfection. Now, this consists, in uniting ourselves to God by love, according to these words of St. Paul—“Above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection” (Colos. iii. 14).

We ought, therefore, set as great value on perfection, and on everything conducive to its attainment, as Solomon says he set on wisdom, and we ought to believe with St. Paul,—that if we gain Jesus Christ it is enough; for all the rest is nothing but dirt and ordure (Phil. iii. 8).

This is the best means we have for attaining perfection. And the degree to which this esteem ascends in our hearts will be the measure of our spiritual advancement.

The reason is, because we desire a thing according to the estimation we hold it in. For our will being a blind faculty that pursues nothing, but what the understanding proposes to it, that value, which our understanding sets upon any object, becomes of necessity the measure of our desires. And our will being the absolute mistress that commands all the interior and exterior

faculties of our souls, we never exert ourselves for the attainment of any object, but according to that degree wherein our will is moved to desire it.

In order, then, that we may earnestly desire perfection, and diligently exert ourselves for its attainment, it is necessary that we hold in high esteem whatever relates to our advancement in perfection. For these things bear such reciprocal relation, that the measure of the one is the infallible rule of the other.

In order to carry on his trade to advantage, a jeweller should know well the value of precious stones : otherwise he may happen to sell at a low rate a jewel of great value. Our traffic is in precious stones ; we are all merchants in the kingdom of heaven, and seek for fine pearls (Matt. xiii. 45).

We should, therefore, be good judges of the merchandise we trade in, lest, by a strange abuse, we give gold for dirt, and part with heaven for earth. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, and let not the strong man glory in his strength, and let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me" (Jer. ix. 23, 24).

The most valuable of all treasures consists in the knowledge, love, and service of God ; this is our greatest and, indeed, our only affair ; or to say better, it is for this we were created ; and it is in this alone, as in our only end, we ought to repose and establish our greatest glory.

I wish, therefore, that this esteem of perfection and of spiritual things conducive to it, would make a deep impression on the hearts of all men, and particularly of religious ; and that we might take care to encourage each other to it, not only by our words, and ordinary conversation, but much more by our actions, and the general tenor of our lives. By this means, all, as well those who are as yet but novices in the way of virtue, as those who are more advanced in it, will realise in practice that in religion we should attach importance to spiritual things only. In fine, as St. Ignatius sets forth in his

constitutions : "What we value most in religious persons is not depth of learning, nor great talents for preaching, nor any other natural or human endowment ; but it is humility and obedience, a spirit of recollection and prayer" (Cons., p. 10). It is this we must, from the beginning, imprint on the minds of all who desire to attain perfection, and it is with this milk they, who intend to lead a holy life must be fed.

When they perceive that, of all things, piety is most valued, that it is the practice those convinced of the vanity of the world are engaged in, and that the pious are chiefly loved and esteemed, then they will presently apply their thoughts, and use their endeavours, not to acquire great learning, or to become famous preachers, but to excel each other in humility and mortification. By this, however, I do not mean, that gaining general esteem or good will should be our motive for embracing virtue. I only assert, that when it shall be known that virtue is the only thing esteemed in religion, we shall be more convinced, that it is the only thing truly deserving of esteem. For everyone coming thus to the knowledge of the true way in which he should walk, will devote himself without reserve to virtue—will apply himself solely to his spiritual advancement, and will believe that everything else is but vanity and folly.

From all this, it can be readily inferred, what a dangerous example is set religious societies, by those who introduce no other topic than human science, and are constantly bestowing praises on such as are eminent for learning.

This example is the more dangerous, because seeing them so highly valued by the graver sort of men, new beginners will conclude, that it is by the acquisition of these things they will be entitled to respect and preferment. Upon this account, learning is the only object they propose to themselves, and the desire of acquiring it increasing daily, the love of humility and mortification insensibly decays in their hearts. At length they make so little account of the one in comparison of the other,

that from intense application to study, they omit what is of stricter obligation.

Now, instead of instilling into the minds of these beginners, the vain desire of being reputed men of learning, would it not be better to represent to them, how important and necessary a thing it is to acquire virtue and humility, and how unprofitable, or rather how dangerous it is, without humility, to be possessed of talents and learning?

We must then proceed upon this ground, and hold it an infallible maxim, that the spiritual exercises conducive to our advancement in piety must ever be preferred to all other things, and that none of these duties must ever be omitted or neglected on any account whatever.

For it is that which maintains us and advances us in virtue: and if we are once negligent therein, we shall soon feel our neglect prejudicial to us. We have but too often experienced, that the derangement of our interior proceeds from our growing cold in spiritual exercises. "My heart is withered," says the Psalmist, "because I have forgot to eat my bread" (Psalm ci. 5). If the food of our souls is wanting, it is certain, we shall become very feeble and languishing. St. Ignatius earnestly recommends this point and often insists upon it. The study of novices and of all others ought to be that of self-denial, and of the most proper means for advancing in virtue and perfection (*Christian Perfection*, Vol. I, Treatise I, Chapter i).

CHAPTER XVII.

The Desire of Perfection necessary for its Attainment.

St. Augustine says that the life of a good Christian is one continued desire of perfection ; because whosoever entertains not always this holy longing in his heart, may be in some sense a Christian, but not a good one ; for desires, as the Angelic Doctor teaches, dispose our souls, and tend to render them fit and ready to receive the good that is suitable to them. And as no man in the world ever was successful in acquiring perfection in any art, either liberal or mechanical, without first efficaciously desiring success, so there never has been found, in the Church of God, any soul attaining to Christian perfection without earnestly wishing to acquire it.

But to penetrate in its fulness so important a truth, we must examine into the arguments which prove it. There are two parts of the soul, again observes St. Thomas, in which desires of spiritual gifts have their residence ; these desires are born in the rational and superior part of the soul ; but they sometimes overflow, so to speak, into the animal and inferior part, filling it with ardour for holy objects, insomuch that even the body is moved to co-operate with the soul in promoting its spiritual advancement.

Holy desires, when they arise in the superior and rational part, are nothing else than movements of the will towards some spiritual excellence which it does not as yet possess, but which it knows to be within its reach.

The reader must mark this well, if he wishes to make an exact analysis of these desires. I repeat, that desire always has reference to good which we do not as yet enjoy ; for the blessings which we already possess do

not excite desire in us, but rather joy, content, and happiness. Thus the ambitious man, when he is raised to dignities and honours for which he had longed, desires them no more, but is glad and rejoices in them. I said, moreover, that desire regards the blessings which we hope to obtain ; for good which we cannot possibly obtain excites not desire, but despair. Thus a traveller, impatient to reach his native land, desires speed of foot, not wings to his shoulders ; because the one is possible, the other is impossible of attainment.

Let us dwell for a moment on this doctrine, since it substantiates powerfully the truth of our proposition.

We have said that desire is an affection of the will towards some good which is possible and suitable for it to obtain and possess.

Hence if a Christian is not desirous of perfection, it is certain that he moves no act of his will to embrace and make it his own ; the will remains motionless, indifferent, languid, and inert. How, then, is it possible that he can ever attain perfection ? Can a person contending for the prize in a public race ever reach the goal without leaving the starting post ? How, then, can the will ever attain perfection if it does not move itself to acts directed towards that end ? And this is the more true, because perfection is a blessing difficult to attain, and only to be acquired by means which are in themselves hard, and depend on the deliberate choice of the will.

Now, if the will has no desire of perfection, if it refuse to make any effort to acquire the same, how can it overcome such difficulties ? How will it be able to choose with courage and to maintain with perseverance a course so full of pain and hardship ?

When these holy desires pass from the superior part of the soul and inundate the inferior, they show themselves in certain holy emotions tending towards the possession of those same spiritual gifts which have been the object of the previous acts of the will. It is unimaginable how much these sensible desires conduce to rapid advancement in perfection by developing the sensitive appetite,

stimulating and strengthening the will, and thus dilating the faculties of the soul, and rendering it capable of great effort for good.

St. Augustine illustrates this by a happy simile. He says that as a person who is to receive a great quantity of merchandise enlarges his sacks and vessels to their full extent, that they may be able to hold more of the wares, so desires enlarge the heart and render it capable of containing great stores of spiritual wealth. And he adduces the example of St. Paul, who tells us that he neglected the past, and reached forward his desires, hoping to become fit to receive that further degree of perfection which yet remained for him to acquire. The holy Doctor deduces from this the consequence, that the whole life of a Christian must be one continual exercise of virtue by means of holy desires. If this be so, what advance in perfection can we expect from him who has no desire of it? The superior part of his soul does not move towards perfection, and the inferior part is not inflamed; his will is inert and relaxed, his feelings fettered and cramped; in short he cares little for perfection, he values it not, he lives in entire forgetfulness of it; it is as thoroughly impossible that he should advance a single step in the way of perfection as it would be for a traveller to arrive at the end of his journey by standing still.

We must then ever bear in mind that good desires are the very foundation which it is our duty to lay in our hearts if we intend to raise the noble edifice of Christian perfection.

Such desires are the seeds from which that tree is to spring, which is to bear the fruit of every virtue. Unless this foundation be laid, unless this seed be sown, it is folly to expect success in the undertaking. We should always bear in mind the axiom of St. Augustine: "That the life of a perfect Christian is nothing else than the going ever forward in the practice of virtue under the impulse of holy aspirations" (Scaramelli, Vol. I, Section 1, Article ii, Chapter I).

CHAPTER XVIII.

The necessity for the Desire of Perfection further Explained.

“Blessed are they,” says the Gospel, “that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill” (Matt. v. 6).

Though the word “justice” is particularly applied to one of the four cardinal virtues as distinct from the rest; nevertheless, it is very applicable to all the virtues, and to sanctity in general.

We give the name of justice to righteousness and to holiness of life, and we call those just, who are holy and virtuous. The Wise Man says, “The justice of the righteous shall deliver them” (Proverbs xi. 6), that is, they shall be saved by their holiness of life.

This word is taken in the same sense in several passages of Scripture. “Unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. v. 20); that is, you will not be saved unless you have more virtue, more religion, and more sanctity, than they have.

In the same manner, must be understood what our Saviour said to St. John, when he refused to baptize Him:—“For so it becometh us to fulfil all justice” (Matt. iii. 15); as if He had said, I must do this to set an example of obedience, of humility, and of all manner of perfection. We must then take in the same sense, those words I have cited in the beginning of this Chapter, and believe that Jesus Christ called those blessed, who have so great a love, and so ardent a desire of virtue, as to feel the same pain from it as is felt from hunger and violent thirst.

St. Jerome writing on this passage says, it is not

enough for us to have a weak desire of virtue and perfection, but we must hunger and thirst after it so as to cry out with the Royal Prophet:—"As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul panteth after thee, O God" (Psalm xli. 2).

This ardent desire is so necessary to us, that as I have said in the foregoing Chapter, all our spiritual advancement depends upon it. It is the first principle that disposes us to it, and our only means of acquiring perfection. The beginning of wisdom, which is nothing else but the knowledge and love of God, wherein this perfection consists, is to have a real and strong desire to obtain it (Wisdom vi. 18).

It is with great justice said by philosophers, that the end is the first cause which impels us to act; so that the more strongly we desire this end the more solicitude and ardour we feel to attain it. I repeat, then, this earnest desire of our spiritual advancement is so necessary—it should spring so immediately from the heart—it should without the aid of anything else, impel us so forcibly—that there are but little hopes of such as feel not its impulse.

The answer of St. Thomas of Aquin to one of his sisters is very well adapted to the present subject. She asked him, "How she could save her soul?" (Hist. Pr. v. 37). He answered, "By willing it"; if you desire it, you will be saved, if you desire it you will make progress in virtue, you will render yourself perfect. All then depends on our willing it, *i. e.* on our willing it seriously and effectually, and on exerting ourselves with all possible diligence to secure our salvation.

For Almighty God is always ready to assist us; but if our will is wanting, all the exertions of our superiors are unavailing. It is you yourself, therefore, that must take your salvation to heart—it is your own affair—it is you alone that are concerned. Let every one, then, be persuaded, that as soon as he begins to grow tepid and negligent in what relates to his spiritual advancement—as soon as he abstains from the exact performance of his

exercises of devotion, and feels not interiorly a great desire of making progress in virtue and of mortifying himself—from that very moment, he conducts badly the business of his eternal salvation. This doctrine is conformable to a rule laid down by St. Ignatius in the beginning of his Constitutions. “It is the interior law,” says he, “of charity and of the divine love imprinted and engraven on our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which ought to support, guide, and make us advance in the way of God’s service.” It is this fire of His love, this insatiable desire of His greater glory, which ought continually urge us to elevate ourselves towards Him, and make us advance in virtue.

This desire once truly imprinted in the soul makes us exert ourselves with fervour and diligence to attain what we wish for. For we are naturally active in seeking and finding out the things we have an inclination for ; and it is for this reason the Wise Man says, “The beginning of wisdom is to excite in our hearts an earnest desire thereof” (Wisdom vi. 18).

But in this we find another advantage also which renders this means very efficacious ; for let the duties be ever so difficult in themselves, a strong attachment to them makes them easy and sweet.

For example, how comes it to pass, that a religious should feel so little pain on quitting the world, and entering religion, but because he desired with his whole heart to become religious ? God inspired him first with an exceeding great desire thereof, which is the grace of vocation, plucked out of his heart all attachment to the world, and planted therein a love of retirement and religion, and every thing became easy.

On the contrary, the very same thing appears extremely painful to persons in the world, because they have not been favoured by God with the desires, and the grace of vocation.

What, think you, is the reason, why the same man is, at one time, dejected and disgusted, and at another time is content and at ease in the performance of his duties ?

Let him not attach the blame thereof to the duties themselves, but let him impute this inconsistency to himself, and to the little relish he has for virtue and mortification. A strong, healthy man, says Father Avila, will, with ease, carry that burden, which a child or sick man cannot raise from the ground. It is only then from the different dispositions of our souls, that the difficulty springs.

The duties are always the same. They seem to us, for a time, so easy, that they cost us no trouble; and if they appear different now from what they had been before, we are to blame ourselves, who, instead of being perfect men, as long since we ought to have been, are still children in virtue—are fallen sick, and have suffered our fervour to grow cold (*Christian Perfection*, Vol. I, Treatise 1, Chapter ii).

What renders so very necessary this desire, and as I may say this hunger and thirst for our spiritual advancement, is, that we cannot have a better disposition than this for obtaining from God the perfection we aim at. St. Ambrose says, that the Lord is so well pleased with the man who feels this longing desire, that he fills his soul with graces and favours; and in support of this assertion, he quotes these words of the Blessed Virgin in her canticle, “He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent away empty” (Luke i. 53).

The Royal Prophet had said the same thing, “For he hath satisfied the empty soul; and hath filled the hungry soul with good things” (Ps. cvi. 9).

Here then we see, as has been observed in a former Chapter, that, in recompense of their good-will, the fervour whereof is most pleasing in His eyes, God has heaped his favours and riches on those who have had so great a zeal for perfection as, in a manner, to have hungered and thirsted after it. An angel appeared to Daniel, and told him his prayers were heard, because he was a man of desires (Dan. ix. 23).

The desire David had of building a temple was so pleasing to God, that though he did not permit him to carry his design into execution, yet as if he had executed

it, the Lord, to recompense him, confirmed the Crown to his posterity.

In fine, so earnest was Zacheus's desire of seeing the Redeemer, that Jesus first looked up to him in the sycamore tree, saying, "Zacheus, make haste and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house" (Luke xix. 5). (*Christian Perfection*, Vol. I, Treatise 1, Chap. iii.)

CHAPTER XIX.

The Desire of Perfection necessary for Salvation.

The reason why many of the faithful, whether religious or secular, care not to acquire the perfection befitting their condition, is doubtless the conviction they entertain that by avoiding mortal sin they can live in the grace of God, and work out their salvation with less trouble and mortification. But they are sadly mistaken ; for allowing that we may, without grievous sin, set at naught that obligation of tending to the perfection suitable to our state which is taught by the Scripture and the Holy Fathers, nevertheless it is most certain that they who neglect to apply themselves earnestly to become perfect, will fall into many other sins which are undeniably mortal, will live with a defiled conscience, and run a great risk of eternal damnation. Everybody knows that the archer must aim higher than the point he wishes to strike with his arrow. And so in the spiritual life, no one will ever persevere in the observance of God's commandments, even to the extent of avoiding grievous transgressions, unless he aim at a somewhat more perfect keeping of the divine law : not merely must he shun slight breaches thereof

and venial faults, as far as is compatible with the frailty of fallen nature, but moreover, he must propose to himself works of supererogation, which though not a matter of strict precept, are yet of counsel, and no less advantageous to us than pleasing to God. We will now, as briefly as possible, consider how this holds good, and in the first place with reference to matters which are only of counsel.

Gerson boldly asserts, that it is very rare indeed for a Christian to keep all the ten commandments of God, unless he perform works of supererogation and follow the divine counsels, either by applying to prayer, frequenting the Sacraments, or by mortifying his flesh with fasting or other austerities, alms-deeds, works of spiritual and corporal mercy, acts of devotion and veneration to the Saints and to Mary their Queen, or by doing other things of a like nature, which are not strictly commanded, but only recommended to us by a sweet counsel (Alphab. 68, Part II. Litt. ii). And Suarez, developing this truth with scholastic rigour, gives us his decision that it is impossible, morally speaking, for a Christian, though he be a Secular, to maintain a steady and lasting purpose to avoid mortal sin, unless he also perform, and resolve ever to perform, many virtuous works that are not actually of precept (*De Relig.*, Tom IV, Lib. 1, C. iv, Num. 12). This he proves by the analogy of nature, showing that natural substances cannot exist without the co-existence and companionship, so to speak, of the accidents or qualities which are proper to them. Thus, for instance, without heat fire is quenched; snow melts away as its coldness diminishes; air without motion becomes unwholesome; still waters soon grow putrid; plants, fruits, and all other natural products, deprived of their native qualities, are spoiled and at length corrupt.

Thus, too, he continues, the grace of God and His love dwindle and eventually perish without good works, which are the supernatural qualities that strengthen, nourish, protect, and develop them. So that a wretched soul, stripped of divine grace through its sloth and listlessness

in doing good, finds itself in great danger of everlasting perdition.

But there is another reason why it must be morally impossible for persons who have no desire of perfection to keep the commandments of God in their essentials ; for their manner of life leads them to commit numberless venial sins, which will certainly pave the way to those grievous transgressions against the Commandments which they would fain avoid. Hence Solomon says, "He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little" (Ecclus. xix. 1). Whence St. Thomas infers that those who are in the habit of venial sin may be said to despise small things ; and thus they dispose themselves by insensible degrees to a grievous fall from grace ; and he accounts for this by adding, that when people take no heed of slight breaches of God's Commandments, they accustom their will to disobedience, and to a very dangerous freedom, so that it easily comes at length to shake off altogether the yoke of the Divine Law.

Thus it is that men are led on step after step from venial sin to deadly sin.

We have a remarkable illustration of this in a memorable incident recorded in the Book of Exodus. Moses had scaled the summit of Mount Sinai ; he had penetrated into the thick clouds that capped the peak of the mountain, and there had held long and familiar discourse with his God, from whose lips he received the heavenly oracles. But what were the Israelites doing meanwhile at the foot of the mountain ? The sacred text informs us ; they were all waiting in idleness and indolence till their great prophet should come back to them. So far no other harm was done than a little slothfulness and loss of time.

Having nothing whatever to do, they began to invite one another to feasting and merry-making. Friends and kinsfolk met and banqueted together on the green sward : soon the bounds of moderation in eating and drinking were overstepped. No great harm, one may

say; only a little gluttony, only a little drunkenness. Being flushed with what they had taken, "they rose up to play."

Men and women, young men and maidens, mingle in the mazes of the dance, and swell their voices in one common chorus. They play, they laugh, they dance, they joke, but without any evil feeling. What harm was there in this? Perhaps a little too much freedom, some want of modesty; hence a lower depth in venial sin. On, then, on: there is no mortal sin as yet. At length, blinded by drink, and made reckless by the license they had been allowing themselves, the people begin to complain to one another: "God only knows when Moses will come down to us from the mountain-top, or how long we shall have to stay in this valley! Why tarry, why wait any longer? Let us make to ourselves a visible God, as they are wont to do in Egypt. Take, Aaron, take all our ear-rings, and gold ornaments, and make us an image worthy to be set up on our altars."

Aaron yields to their demand. A golden calf is cast and put up for the adoration of the people, who sacrilegiously burn incense before it, and offer abominable sacrifices (Exodus xxxii). See now the evil there may be in a little idleness, in some slight excess in eating and drinking, in too great freedom between the sexes. By such steps as these the wretched Israelites came at length to fall in abject idolatry before a golden calf. This is not a commentary of mine: I am but quoting St. Gregory: "Eating and drinking led the people to revel; revelling drew them into idolatry: for if we check not ourselves in lesser temptations, we shall soon fall into some great sins, 'He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little' (Ecclus. xix. 1). And of a truth, if we are heedless in small matters, we shall be gradually led astray by habit and passion, and of a surety fall into grievous sins" (Scaramelli, Section I, Article 2, Chap. iii).

CHAPTER XX.

The Desire of Perfection must be Continual.

We have hitherto shown that the foundation of the spiritual building of Christian Perfection is the earnest desire to attain it, and we have furnished the means of laying this foundation in the hearts of those who desire their salvation ; in other words, we have suggested certain motives which may serve to stir up these holy desires within the soul.

We must next proceed to show that this foundation will be of little use unless it be firmly set and immovably fixed in the hearts of men. Or, waiving all metaphor, we have to prove that such desires, to be effectual, must never slacken or grow cold ; but that when one step in perfection has been made good, we should aspire to a still further height ; for, if this be not done, our former labours will be of no avail, and we shall speedily relapse into our original lukewarmness.

Before, however, bringing any authorities in support of this assertion, we will adduce proofs from reason, to the end that the sayings of the Fathers, and the warnings of the Divine Scriptures, may not seem exaggerated. Christian Perfection has no determinate limit beyond which we may not advance—in the sense that he who has reached that term is to be spoken of as perfect, while they who lag behind are to be called imperfect. Such limit is found in the liberal and mechanical arts, for an artisan, an architect, or a painter, if they succeed in producing works in full conformity with the rules of their respective arts or handicrafts, may be said to be perfect, and will scarcely have any further progress to make. But Christian perfection has no such limits, as it mainly consists in charity, which may increase in the

measure of the goodness of God, which is its formal object. For, St. Thomas observes, as the claims which God has to our love are boundless, charity can ever add fresh ardour and indefinite intensity to its flames. He hence infers what we have already stated, to wit, that in this life it can know no bounds. Consequently, there can be no limit whatever to our perfection. The same may be said of all those means helping to attain perfection, which form instrumental perfection ; for if we consider this as removing the obstacles in the way of charity by mortifying our lusts and senses, it knows no term, since our passions can never be wholly brought under, and must therefore be incessantly mortified and held in check. And if we take it on its positive side, as disposing us for an increase of charity by the perfect exercise of every virtue, it is plain that it can never reach its limits, as our virtues are always susceptible of improvement. If, then, this be the case, if our perfection can have no limits, nor remain stationary in any resting-place, it follows of necessity that it consists in an unceasing progress in the moral virtues, and in a constant increase of charity. Hence, let no one fancy himself perfect who, having reached a certain degree of charity, will go no farther ; rather let him, after he has sufficiently overcome the obstacles in the path of charity, advance in virtue, and intensify within his heart the ardours of Divine love. My conclusion, then, is, that if our desires of perfection are to have their true result, they must never cool, but grow more and more ardent, and ever aim at higher flights ; for, since our perfection has no limits, we should set no bounds to our desires of attaining to it.

Solomon has this very thing in view when he tells us that the path of perfection wherein the just man walks ever grows in brightness and in the splendour of increasing virtue, until it reaches the full noontide of the glories of Paradise. “ But the path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards, and increaseth even to perfect day” (Proverbs iv. 18).

The Royal Prophet set forth the same idea : “ Blessed

is the man who has settled in his heart to advance in the way of perfection as long as he sojourns in this vale of tears ; for with the blessing and the help of the Lord, our Lawgiver, he shall rise from virtue to virtue, until he come to behold his God face to face, in the blessed Sion of the heavenly Jerusalem " (Ps. lxxxiii. 9).

We may observe that the Psalmist calls him blessed whose heart ever aspires to greater perfection ; and this is equivalent to saying that such a one is perfect, for in perfection does our blessedness here below consist, and on it depends our everlasting bliss. " Let him that is just, become justified still ; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still " (Apoc. xxii. 11). So true is it that Christian perfection knows no halting-place, and that he is the most perfect who ever aspires to greater perfection.

Let us now hearken to what the great Apostle of the Gentiles has to say on this point. He is one of the greatest of the Saints ; a star of the first magnitude in the firmament of Holy Church. What persecutions, what sufferings, what toils did he not undergo for Christ's sake ! What burning charity he had, what transports of love, what zeal for the honour of Jesus ! Who may fully relate all his revelations, his visions, his ecstasies ; his being rapt even to the third heaven ? Yet the holy Apostle, though enriched with so many virtues, and so high gifts, did not deem himself perfect (Philip. iii. 12). He tells us how he had been stoned, frequently scourged, often shipwrecked, tossed night and day by the waves (2 Cor. xi. 25). He mentions his many watchings, his frequent fasts, the hunger and thirst, the nakedness and cold suffered by him for the love of our Lord (2 Cor. xi. 27). He speaks of his having been taken up to the third heaven while yet in mortal flesh (2 Cor. xii. 14). He was even able to say that he lived no longer in himself, but wholly in Christ, for that he was transformed into Him by love (Gal. ii. 20).

Yet with all this he declares his persuasion that he had not reached perfection (Philip. iii. 12).

But, O Doctor of the Gentiles, if all these things suffice not to make you perfect, to what means do you attribute your having acquired the perfection you reached—how did you attain such a height of sanctity? “*Sequor autem si comprehendam,*” he answers. “I go forward as far as I can in the path of perfection: I stretch forth ever by desires and works to what is before me in the race.”

The gloss on this passage makes an observation which is quite to our point: “Let no Christian, though he may think himself to have made great spiritual progress, ever say, ‘Enough, now I can rest’; for by speaking thus he forsakes the way of perfection before he has yet arrived at the term of everlasting bliss.”

Nor is St. Augustine of another mind: “The best—that is, the most perfect man, is not he who, having reached a certain degree of perfection, halts there, but rather is he who ever tends to God, our unchangeable Life, with the most ardent yearnings of his heart, and who ever unites himself with God more and more closely” (In lib. *De Doct. Christ.*).

St. Bernard is still more emphatic: “Perfection rightly understood is nothing else than an untiring endeavour to improve, a ceaseless striving after perfection. If therefore to be perfect is one and the self-same thing as to tend with all one’s might to perfection, surely to fail in seriously applying ourselves to become perfect, is to be wanting in perfection. Where, then, shall we place those who are wont to say: Enough: we need not be better than those who have gone before us” (Epist. 253, ad Abbat Garivum).

But the reader may here charge me with inconsistency, since in a preceding Chapter I have stated that Charity is the essence of Christian perfection, while now I appear to forsake this position, and to make it consist, according to St. Paul and the holy Doctors above quoted, in a continual progress in virtue, and in an unwearying desire of ever improving in spirit. But there is no contradiction in the two propositions: they are not at all incompatible with each other.

True it is that perfection consists essentially in Charity

and that the means for attaining to it are the moral virtues and the counsels. But then our perfection requires as a necessary condition, without which it cannot be lasting, that Charity and the other virtues should go on increasing ever and daily augmenting; for unless they have this fixedness and solidity, perfection dwindles away and wholly vanishes.

To the above reasoning I will add another argument, which will put the matter in the clearest light. I have already shown that, in order to be perfect, it is necessary that our desires should always tend to something higher, as Christian perfection has no limit: the further reason I have promised to give is this: not only is there no boundary beyond which perfection may not pass, but it neither has nor can have any halting-place at which it may tarry; to destroy it, nothing more is needed than to stand still and cease to go forward.

Who is there that does not know, that has not felt, the fierce conflict which is ever waged within us? We have as many domestic foes rising in rebellion against us, as we have passions that ruffle the calm of our souls, and by their lawless upheaving incite us to sin, and bear us towards never-ending ruin. It is hard to say which are the most impetuous, which the most dangerous: whether prodigality or covetousness, love or hate, presumption or despair, ambition or envy. This alone is certain, that, among the several passions, that single one that predominates within us suffices to drag us from the way of perfection, and to hurry us down the broad steep of perdition to irreparable ruin.

Nor are our outward enemies—those bad spirits who hem us in on all sides—less to be feared; in every place their temptations surround us; wherever we have to tread they have prepared a snare for our feet to make us fall. We are thus compelled to be ever on the alert, armed with self-denial and all manner of virtue, and especially with ardent charity, so as to be able to beat down the insurrection of our domestic enemies, and to repel the attacks of foes from without. Hence, if it happen that

anyone, impressed with the idea of the progress he has made, wishes to rest contented at the point he has reached, and thus grows slack in the practice of virtue, and allows his charity to cool, it is plain that the assaults of such numerous enemies will be successful, that he will be pierced with many wounds, and driven far from the path of perfection. If an army, marching with enthusiasm to the siege of a fortress of which it is resolved to take possession, meet the enemy on its path, can it halt without going either forward or backward? Assuredly not: for in its front there are those who attack and seek to drive it back; it must either put forth its strength against the foe and march bravely forward, or else shamefully turn its back and flee. So too, he who has begun to climb up the mountain of perfection cannot stand still midway, for he has too many foes who assail and harass him in a thousand ways. He must needs mount higher still, buoyed up and made valiant by the strength of his desires, else, should these grow languid, he will have to give way to the foe and beat a retreat.

It has been well said by St. Bernard that, "to halt in the way of perfection is to turn back; hence let no one say: I have made sufficient progress; I will go no farther; enough for me to be what I was yesterday, and in times past" (Ep. 342). And in proof of this he alludes to Jacob's ladder, that lively symbol of Christian perfection; for on it no one stood still, but all were either going up or coming down. Whence he infers, whoever designs to stand still on some one step of the mystic ladder of perfection, attempts that which is impossible, and must fall to the ground.

But the mellifluous Doctor is still more emphatic in another letter written to a monk who had allowed the desire of progress to slacken in his soul; addressing him in a tone of familiar dialogue, the Saint proceeds as follows: "And so, O monk, you refuse to go forward, and desire no further perfection. You wish then to turn back and to lose what you have made good? Assuredly not. God forbid! What then do you propose? I

mean to live as I am and to abide in the degree of perfection I have already reached. I intend to become neither better nor worse.—I can tell you then that what you propose is a sheer impossibility. Is there any one thing in this world that ever abides unchanged? Does not the Holy Ghost say of man himself that, “he fleeth like a shadow and never continueth in the same state” (Epist. 253, ad Abbat Garivum).

In other passages of his letters the same holy Doctor rebukes those lukewarm and languid souls whose desires of perfection grow less earnest, by contrasting them with worldlings who are never satisfied with perishable goods. He tries in this manner to shame and arouse the tepid by their example. “Did you ever meet with an ambitious man,” he writes, “who after attaining to one dignity, did not hanker after one of a higher grade? What shall I say of the covetous? Are they not ever thirsting after increase of gain? Are men of pleasure ever sated with their luxury? Do not the vain-glorious ever go in quest of new honours? If, therefore, the desires of persons who are bent on obtaining the trifles of earth be thus insatiable, should we not blush to be less eager after Spiritual goods, less bent on perfection?”

These convincing arguments and just rebukes ought to enable us to awaken within ourselves the desires of greater perfection, and not to suffer holy aspirations to become less ardent; for should this take place, the result is, that virtuous works cease, no progress is made, there is a stand-still in the road of perfection; and as we have seen, to stop is to go backward, and even sometimes to fall without hope of recovery.

We should therefore keep ever before our minds the saying of St. Anthony, who as St. Athanasius relates, was ever sounding in the ears of his disciples, to look upon themselves as beginners, never to relax their efforts, but always to continue to aim at making greater Spiritual progress (Scaramelli, Section I, Article 2, Chapter iv).

“The ways of the just are like the sun that rises, and increases both in light and heat till mid-day” (Prov. iv. 18).

The farther they proceed the more they increase in virtue, and to use the words of St. Bernard, the just man never believes that he has fully performed his duty ; he never says it is enough, but always hungers and thirsts after justice ; so that if he were to live here always, he would perpetually strive to become more just and more perfect, and to advance always from good to better (Ep. 253 to Ab. Gaurin).

Again it is written of the just, "They shall go from virtue to virtue" (Ps. lxxxiii. 8) ; *i. e.*, they shall continually increase in fervour, and advance in virtue without stopping till they ascend the height of perfection. But the way of the tepid, the imperfect, and the wicked, is like unto the light of the evening, which, decreasing every moment, at length disappears, and leaves us in the darkness of night. The way of the wicked, says the wise man, is full of darkness, so that they cannot see the precipices into which they fall (Prov. iv. 19). They stumble every step they take. Their confusion is so great, and their blindness so deplorable, that they see not their faults, and feel no remorse for them. On the contrary, judging of sins according to their fancy, they will not believe that to be a sin which is so in reality, and will often think that to be but venial which is mortal ; nay, will consider it to be nothing more than a trivial imperfection (*Christian Perfection*, Treatise I, Chapter v).

CHAPTER XXI.

That not to advance in Virtue is to go back.

It is a maxim received by all holy men, that in the Way of God we certainly go back, if we do not advance. This is the point I intend to demonstrate here, that it

may be a powerful motive to encourage us daily to make new progress in perfection. For what man is there, that, after having travelled homeward several days, would feel inclined to go back, particularly when he calls to mind the sentence the Saviour of the world pronounces against him, "No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke ix, 62). These words should make us tremble. The great St. Austin, upon this occasion, says, we cannot possibly prevent ourselves from descending, but by always striving to ascend; for as soon as we begin to stop, we descend, and not to advance, is to go-back; so that if we wish not to go back, we must always run forward without stopping (Ep. 113 to Dem. Vir).

St. Gregory, St. Chrysostom, St. Leo Pope, and many other saints, say the same, and express themselves almost in the same terms. But St. Bernard enlarges on this subject in two of his epistles. Addressing himself to a negligent and tepid religious, who contents himself with leading an ordinary life, and struggles not for his advancement, St. Bernard thus discourses with him: "Well! will you not advance? No. What then? Will you go back? By no means. What will you do then? I will remain as I am, and grow neither better nor worse."

Then you will do what is impossible, for in this life there can be no state of permanency. This is a privilege appertaining to God alone, "With whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration" (Jas. i. 17). "I am the Lord, and I do not change" (Mal. iii. 6). But all things in this world are subject to a perpetual change. "All of them shall grow old like a garment," says the Psalmist, speaking of the heavens, "and as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed, but thou art always the self-same, and thy years shall not fail" (Ps. ci. 28). Man, above all, according to the testimony of holy Job, is never long in the same condition; he passeth like a shadow, and never continueth in the same state. (Job xiv. 2). Jesus Christ Himself, as

St. Bernard adds, as long as he lived here on earth and conversed with men, was not stationary ; “ He advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men.” (Luke ii. 52). That is to say, that as he grew in age, he gave more signal proofs of his wisdom and holiness, and prepared himself as a champion to run his race of labour and suffering (Ps. xviii. 7). St. John also declares, that, “ he that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk even as he walked ” (1 John ii. 6). But if, while our Saviour runs on, you stop, is it not clear that you will remain behind him instead of approaching near him ?

Holy Scripture (Gen. xxviii. 12) tells us, that Jacob saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, on the top of which Almighty God leaned, and that it was full of angels ascending and descending perpetually without ever resting. Now, according to St. Bernard, this is to show us, that in the way of virtue, there is no medium between ascending and descending, between advancing and going back. But as when we work at the lathe, the wheel flies back when we wish to stop it, even so, the very moment you cease to advance in virtue, you must of necessity go back.

Abbot Theodore explains the same thought in these terms related by Cassian (Cas. Collat. vi) : We must, says he, apply ourselves without remissness to the study of virtue, and strenuously exert ourselves in the practice thereof, lest ceasing to grow better, we should instantly begin to grow less perfect ; for, as was already said, our souls cannot remain long in the same state, so as not to increase or to decrease in virtue ; not to gain is to lose, and whoever feels not in himself a desire of making progress is in danger of falling instantly.

The same Cassian explains this by a very just comparison, which St. Gregory (Greg. iii. 2, past. Adm. 51) likewise makes use of. Those who lead a spiritual life, says he, are like a man in the midst of a rapid river ; if he stops but for a moment, and strives not continually to bear up against the stream, he will run great risk of being carried down. Now the course we ought to take

is so directly opposite to the current of our nature corrupted by sin, that unless we labour and force ourselves to go on, we shall certainly be hurried back by the impetuous torrent of our passions.

“The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away” (Matt. xi. 12). And as when you go against the tide you must row without ceasing; if you stop but for a while you find that you have drifted far from the place you had rowed to; so here you must still push forward, and make head against the current of your depraved passions, unless you be content to see yourself quickly carried far back from that degree of perfection which you had before attained. To explain this the more clearly, St. Chrysostom gives several familiar examples: If a servant, says he, were not a thief, nor a drunkard, nor a gamester, but trusty, sober, and without vice; yet, if he should idle his time, sit down all day, without performing the duties of his state; there is no doubt but he would deserve to be severely punished; for though he did no positive harm, yet it is fault enough to neglect what he ought to do. Again, if a husbandman, though exceedingly well conducted in every other respect, should nevertheless stand with his arms across, and neither plough nor sow, it is certain, though he did no other harm, he would, on this account alone, be culpable; for it is fault enough, to neglect one’s duty. In fine, if one of our hands gave us no pain, but were paralytic, and absolutely of no use to us, should we not consider that circumstance alone to be of great detriment? It is just so in spiritual matters. If a person remains idle—if he makes no effort to advance in virtue, he is much to be blamed, because he fulfils not his obligations. To conclude, what greater fault can we find with land, than that it be barren and bears no crop, though it has been well tilled? In the same manner, if your soul, continually cultivated by so many good instructions, watered by frequent showers of heavenly graces, and warmed by the rays of the sun of justice, produces no fruit, but remains dry and barren,

will you not think that dryness and barrenness a great misfortune to yourself? It is of this the Psalmist complains, when he says, "They repaid me evil for good" (Ps. xxxiv. 12). (*Christian Perfection*, Vol. I, Treatise I, Chap. vi).

CHAPTER XXII.

We must forget the good we have done, and think only on what remains yet to be done.

"Let him that is just become still more just, and let him that is holy become still more holy" (Apoc. xxii. 11). St. Jerome and Venerable Bede tell us, that our Saviour in saying, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled," wished to teach us, that we must never think we are just enough, but must always aspire to greater justice, as St. John recommends in the above passage. To this effect St. Paul proposes to us an excellent means he himself had made use of. "Brethren," says he, "I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do; forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 13). If, then, the Apostle of the Gentiles, the vessel of election, does not believe himself perfect, who will dare think himself so? He believes not that he has attained perfection, but endeavours all he possibly can, to acquire it. For this purpose he forgets all he has done, and only looks to what he is deficient in, and it is to obtain this, that he excites and encourages himself with all his might. All the Saints

have very much extolled and earnestly recommended this means.

St. Basil and St. Jerome teach, that whoever wishes to be a saint, must forget what he has done, and constantly think on what he has still to do, and that he is truly happy who advances daily, and who never thinks on what he did yesterday, but on what he has to do to-day in order to make new progress. But St. Gregory and St. Bernard descend more to particulars, and say, that this means prescribed by St. Paul consists of two principal parts. The first is to forget the good we have done, and never to look back at it. Certainly we stand much in need of this warning in particular; for it is very natural in us to cast our eyes on what is pleasing, and to turn them away from what may be displeasing.

Hence, taking pleasure in looking at our improvement, and the good we fancy we have done; and on the contrary, feeling it painful to think on our spiritual wants and poverty, we are inclined to dwell rather on the former than on the latter. St. Gregory says, that as a sick man in a burning fever, is always searching for the coolest and softest part of his bed to find a little ease, even so human weakness ordinarily fixes its eye on the good it has done. But St. Bernard says, that there is extreme danger in this. For if you look only to the good works you have done, you will readily yield to vain-glory, preferring yourself to others; you will not endeavour to ascend, believing yourself already arrived at a high degree of perfection. In a word, you will begin to grow tepid, and from tepidity falling into negligence, you will quickly bring on your ruin.

The example of the Pharisee in the gospel shows us plainly what must befall those who act in this manner. He cast his eyes on the good works he had done, and then enumerating them, he said, "O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican. I fast twice in a week: I give tithes of all that I possess." And the publican standing afar off would not do so much as lift

up his eyes to heaven : but striking his breast, saying, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

"I say to you," says our Saviour, "this man went down into his house more justified than the other" (Luke xviii. 11-14). Thus we see the one by humbling himself was justified, while the other by his criminal presumption drew upon himself the sentence of his condemnation and of his death.

This is the plan the devil has formed against us. By always representing to us the good we have done, his design is to instil into us a high esteem of ourselves, and a contempt of our neighbour, that by yielding to pride, we may bring on our own condemnation.

There is still another danger, as St. Bernard says, in looking back on the good we have done. It is that we will, in consequence, make no effort to advance ; we will grow cold in the business of heaven, and at length fancying that we have done enough we will think only on resting ourselves.

In order to avoid these inconveniences, we must always think not on what we have already done, but on what still remains to be done. For the former tempts us to stop, while the latter incites us to go on with our work. This is the second branch of the means the apostle teaches us—to have our eyes fixed on what we are deficient in, that we may be encouraged to attain it. St. Gregory explains this by several familiar comparisions, and says, that as a man who owes a thousand crowns does not think his debt discharged by his having paid three or four hundred, but still reflects on what he is still to pay, and cannot be at ease till he has fully satisfied his creditor, so we, who are deeply indebted to Almighty God, ought not to reckon what we have paid, but ought always to consider what we are still to pay in order to satisfy the debt that remains : besides it should be our chief care to find out the means of doing so.

Again, as men on a road, who travel with a firm resolution of arriving at their journey's end, never look back to see how many miles they have already gone,

but consider how far they have yet to go, and think of nothing else till they arrive at the destined place: in like manner, we, who are travellers in this world, and purpose to go to heaven, our true country, ought not to consider how far we have gone, but how far we have yet to go, and how to get thither.

When a man, adds he, undertakes a journey to any place, it avails him nothing to have gone a great way, unless he continues to go on till he comes to his journey's end, because it is only at his arrival there he can expect the recompense of all his labour. It is therefore of no avail, that you run well at first, if you get tired in the middle of your course; and hence the apostle counsels us:—Run so as you may carry the prize (1 Cor. ix. 24). Never look back upon the space you have left behind, but keep your eyes fixed upon the goal you aim at. Consider that it is perfection you ought to aspire to, and think how far you have yet to go to arrive there, and, in consequence, you will make haste still to advance; for as St. Chrysostom says, a man never ceases to run whilst he thinks he is not yet arrived at the end of his journey.

St. Bernard says, that we ought to imitate merchants, who, though they have acquired considerable property and encountered much hardship and pain, yet so far from being content with their gain or discouraged by their losses, constantly endeavour to acquire additional property, as if hitherto they had neither done nor gained anything.

It is in the same manner, says he, we ought constantly to endeavour to increase our store, and to enrich ourselves in humility, charity, mortification, and in all the virtues; and, in a word, like good merchants for heaven, we ought to make no account of the slight pains we have hitherto felt nor of the riches we have acquired.

It is for this reason our Blessed Saviour compares the kingdom of heaven to a merchant, and commands us, to traffic till he comes (Luke xix. 13).

We should lose no opportunity of making some new

progress in virtue, and as St. Ignatius says, "Let us encourage one the other never to lose any degree of perfection, which by the mercy of God, it is in our power to attain" (Reg. 15 Sum). (*Christian Perfection*, Vol. I, Treatise 1, Chapter vii.)

CHAPTER XXIII.

That we must forget the good we have done,
and think only on what remains yet to be
done, further explained.

This means has been inculcated by St. Paul, both by word and example, "But one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 13, 14).

As if he were to say, forgetting the things which are behind, the good I have already wrought, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, to the good I have still to do, I press forward towards the goal with all the strength of my soul, and I continue to run in the course of perfection, that so I may gain the prize which God, by calling me to Himself, has appointed unto me.

St. John Chrysostom has given a development of this text which is exactly suited to our discourse. He says that "to dwell on the good we have done begets two evil consequences ; first, it fosters a vain self-complacency which will insensibly make us proud and presumptuous ; and next, it makes us slothful for good, because, casting glances of self-approval upon our good deeds of past times, we remain satisfied and contented with ourselves, and cease to aim at further progress." Whence he infers

that "if the Apostle, after numerous perils of death, after toils and sufferings, great enough to kill him many times over, cast his former works behind his back without bestowing a thought on them, much rather should we, who are so inferior to him in virtue and merit, do the same" (Hom. II, in Epist. ad Phil.).

Having, then, forgotten the past, continues the holy Doctor, we should imitate the example of St. Paul, and look forward even as they that run a race, who stay not to measure the distance they have traversed, but hurry on towards the goal, and with thought of it take fresh courage. The more so because the remembrance of the good we have done is of no use whatever, unless this good be completed and made perfect by the fulfilment of what remains to be done.

Not content with this very apt exposition of these words of St. Paul, he further adds most pertinent reflections in order to imprint more deeply in our souls this spiritual aphorism which has so great might to urge us forward in the path of perfection. "Observe then," says the Saint, "the Apostle does not say, I value not, I set no store by my past good works—I never speak of them—but I have wholly forgotten them; for this forgetfulness it is that makes us diligent and earnest in well-doing, and imparts to our souls a certain alacrity and readiness to do what yet remains to be done in order to attain to perfection." He further observes, on the expression, "reaching forth unto those things which are before," that by it the Apostle describes the singular efforts he made to mount ever to a higher and more eminent degree of perfection.

For as he that runs a race, in his eagerness to reach the winning post, stretches forward his whole body, feet and face and arms, in order to hasten his course; so did this Saint, with a continually increasing eagerness of desire, stretch forth his spirit, and make it tend to a still greater perfection; thus did he run with great alacrity and fervour in the way of the Lord: thus too must we also run if we seriously aspire to perfection.

Finally, let us reflect that this forgetfulness of the good we have done, this stretching forward with all the power of our soul to the good that remains to be done, is not only, according to the Apostle, a means of perfection, but—as we pointed out in the preceding Chapter—it is itself perfection; for St. Paul winds up by saying, that whoever is perfect *adopts* this course, and in this sense precisely St. Bernard explains the text: “Whosoever then would be a perfect Christian, let him utterly forget all the good he has done in time past, and let him keep the eyes of his mind and the desire of his soul ever fixed on the good which yet remains to be done in the time to come” (Lib. *De Vita Solit.*). (*Guide to the Spiritual Life*, Section I, Article 2, Chapter v.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

To aim at the highest things is very conducive to Perfection.

It will conduce much to our spiritual advancement if we propose to ourselves as objects the highest things, and such as are of more exquisite perfection, according to the counsel of the Apostle, “Be zealous for the better gifts; and I show unto you yet a more excellent way” (1 Cor. xii. 31). This means is without doubt of very great importance; for our desire must necessarily soar high, if we wish to elevate our actions to that perfection, with which even our indispensable duties should be performed. This may be easily explained by a familiar comparison: when your bow is too feebly bent, you will never be able to hit the mark unless you aim considerably higher; because the looseness of the string gives to the

arrow a downward direction. It is precisely so with us. Our nature is so feeble, and we are so relaxed by the evil habits we have contracted, that we must take our aim considerably higher than the mark, if we wish to reach it. Man is become so weak by sin, that to attain an ordinary degree of virtue his thoughts and desires must soar much higher. But some will say, "All I propose is to avoid mortal sin : this is the only perfection I aspire to." It is much to be feared you will not reach this point you propose to yourself, for the string is slack. Perhaps you would have reached this point, had you directed your thoughts higher ; but not having done so, it is probable you will never reach it, and it is very probable you will fall into mortal sin. The person who intends not only to keep the commandments of God, but likewise endeavours to follow His counsels—the person who proposes to avoid not only mortal, but also venial sins, and even the least imperfections, as much as he can, adopts a good means of not falling into mortal sin, because he takes his aim considerably higher ; and though his frailty should hinder him from attaining the proposed object, yet at most he will fail only in something of counsel, in some slight imperfection or venial sin. But he whose object is only not to offend God mortally, will doubtless fall into some mortal sin, if his bow is even in the slightest degree slackened, and if he fails to point at the object.

"Why," says St. Austin, "are we commanded to love God with all our heart, which is a command we cannot fully perform in this life? It is because a man never runs well, if he knows not how far he has to go" (*Lib. de Perf.*, tom. vii). Almighty God has set immediately before our eyes the greatest of all the commandments, that aiming at an object so sublime, at perfection so complete, we may constantly endeavour to reach it ; and if, through weakness, we are unable to reach, the higher we aim, the nearer shall we approach the object.

For this reason, therefore, we say it is necessary for us to direct our thoughts high ; to raise our eyes and hearts

to sublime things, that if unable, through weakness, to reach them, we may not at least be kept back at so great a distance from them. Let us act on this occasion like merchants who ask a great deal more for a thing than it is worth, to induce the buyers to give the value of the article; or like referees, who, to bring the parties at variance to a reasonable settlement, demand at first too much, that they may obtain what is equitable. But what I desire you to demand is not too much; it is just and moderate. Ever keep your eye fixed on it, that you may at least obtain what is absolutely necessary. Propose to yourself great treasures that you may be able to acquire a competency. For if you propose to yourself at first only what is of little value, you will be far from acquiring it (*Christian Perfection*, Vol I, Treatise I, Chapter viii).

CHAPTER XXV.

How important it is not to neglect the smallest things.

“He that contemneth small things,” as it is said in Ecclesiasticus, “shall fall by little and little” (Eccles. xix. 1). The doctrine contained in these words is of great importance to all persons, especially to those who aspire to perfection: for we are exact in the performance of great things, as they carry with themselves their own recommendation; but it is very usual with us to be careless in small things, as we fancy they are of no great consequence. In this, however, we deceive ourselves, because it is very dangerous to neglect and fail in these things; and therefore the Holy Ghost in this passage of Scripture declares to us, “That he who contemns

small things, shall fall by little and little." To convince us then of this truth, and to oblige us to be watchful, it ought to be sufficient that God Himself says so : but in order that this may make a deeper impression on our minds, let us consider at greater length what was the opinion of the Saints on this subject. St. Bernard says, "That those who run into disorders and crimes of the highest nature begin at first by committing small faults, and no person ever falls or plunges himself all at once into an excess of wickedness" (Bern. de ord. vit. et mor. instit.). That is to say, that commonly speaking, none ever ascend at once to the highest point of vice or virtue, but that good and evil gradually insinuate themselves, and grow insensibly in us.

It happens in spiritual as it does in corporal diseases ; both the one and the other increase by little and little ; so that when you see a person commit some great fault, do not imagine, says the Saint, that this disease then begins, for no one ever falls on a sudden into an enormous sin, who has for a long time led an innocent and virtuous life. But the downward course begins first by negligence in those duties which are considered as unimportant, then devotion grows cold, and diminishes daily more and more ; so that at length these careless Christians deserve that God should withdraw his hand, and no longer supported by Him, they easily yield and fall under the first great temptation that attacks them.

Cassian explains this very well, by a comparison taken from Holy Scripture. Houses fall not to ruin on a sudden, but the damage first begins by some gutters out of repair and neglected, through which rain entering, by degrees rots the timber that sustains the building. In process of time it penetrates the wall, dissolves the cement, and at last undermines the very foundation, so that the whole edifice tumbles to the ground, perhaps in one night, "By slothfulness a building shall be brought down, and through the weakness of hands, the house shall drop through" (Ecclesiastes x. 18).

It is just so with us, says the same author, a certain

natural inclination which we have to evil, first flatters our senses, then gains ground, and insinuating itself into our souls, shakes the firmness of our good resolutions, and at last so weakens and undermines the whole foundation of our piety, that the entire spiritual edifice falls in a moment. A little care and vigilance in the beginning might have easily prevented the growth of the evil; but because we neglected it when it was but small, and did not take care in time to correct such faults as appeared to us but inconsiderable, this shameful sloth became the cause of serious spiritual falls.

Would to God that sad experience had not taught us, that these woeful examples are too frequent amongst us! In truth we have great reason to wonder, and to tremble at the same time, when we consider that the ruin of many, who have fallen into this precipice, had its origin from small and trifling occasions. All this happens by the wile and craft of the devil, who dares not attack those that serve God, by tempting them in the beginning to omit things very essential, but begins by those that seem to be of little consequence, and insensibly gaining some slight advantage, he succeeds better in this manner, than if he had acted otherwise.

For if at first he should propose and tempt us to mortal sin, he would be quickly discovered and repulsed; but insinuating himself by little and little, he through our slight omissions and small faults gets into our souls before we are aware of it.

It is for this reason St. Gregory says, "that small faults are in some manner more dangerous than great ones" (Greg. 3. past. adm. 34), because great faults, as soon as we reflect on them, carry such horror along with them, as obliges us to endeavour to arise speedily after we have fallen, and to be very circumspect in avoiding them for the future. But the less we perceive small faults, the less we avoid them, and making no account of them, we fall so often, that in time we acquire such a habit of them, as we seldom or never are able to eradicate; so that the evil which at first seemed nothing

becomes, by neglect and frequent relapses, almost incurable.

St. Chrysostom confirms the same, when treating of this subject : "I dare," says he, "advance a proposition which will appear strange and unheard of. It seems to me that men ought to be less vigilant in flying from great sins, than in avoiding small faults ; for the enormity of great sins naturally excites in us a horror of them, but we are easily induced to commit little faults, because we fancy them not to be considerable, and the little account we make of them, preventing us from endeavouring to correct them, they become at last so great by our negligence, that we are no longer able generously to resist and put a stop to them " (Chrys. hom. 87, sup. Matt.)

It is for this reason that the devil chiefly makes use of this means to assault those who are striving after perfection, and those that serve God, because he knows it will be afterwards more easy for him to make them fail in greater and more essential duties. "It makes no matter," says St. Austin, "whether a ship be sent to the bottom by one great wave, or whether the water entering gradually by the chinks, at length sinks the vessel " (Aug. Ep. 118 ad. Seleu.). The devil in like manner, cares not whether he enters the soul by this or that breach, all being equal to him, provided he attains his end, and brings you to a miserable shipwreck. St. Bonaventure says, "That of many small drops of rain great torrents are formed, which undermine and tumble down strong walls ; and that a small chink by which the water gets into a ship ; oftentimes causes the loss of a vessel " (Bon. sup. Ps. lxvi). Wherefore St. Austin tells us, that as when a ship springs a leak, the sailors must immediately ply the pumps, in order to get out the water and prevent her from sinking ; so we also, by fervent prayer, and a strict examination of conscience, must continually endeavour to root out of our hearts whatever imperfection or impurity has found its way into them, which, if neglected, would at last cause our ruin.

"You are armed," says St. Austin, "and prepared to

defend yourself against great sins ; but what care do you take to avoid small faults ? Are you not afraid of them also ? You have already thrown overboard those heavy bales, which would have sunk your ship ; but take care that the small heap of sand, still in the hold, does not bring you down " (Aug. sup. Ps. xxxix. 13).

You have happily escaped all the storms raised against you, in the tempestuous sea of the world ; but take precaution lest you be wrecked in the harbour.

For as it would avail nothing that a ship should have weathered all the storms, and escaped all the rocks at sea, if she is wrecked in port ; so it would be of no advantage to you to have resisted all the assaults of the strongest temptations, if afterwards you yield to weaker ones and thereby lose your soul (*Christian Perfection*, Volume I, Treatise 1, Chapter ix).



CHAPTER XXVI.

Another reason which shows how requisite it is to attach importance to small things.

Another very cogent reason why we should apply ourselves with great care and attention to the smallest things conducive to our perfection, is, that if we neglect to perform them, it is to be feared that God will refuse us these special graces, which we stand in need of, both to preserve us from sin, and to assist us in attaining the perfection we aim at, and for want of which graces we shall be exposed to great danger. In order to comprehend this better, we must premise the doctrine of St. Paul, who teaches, that God never refuses that supernatural assistance, which is necessary and sufficient for everyone to overcome, if he wishes the strongest

temptation. "God is faithful," says the Apostle, "who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13).

Besides this general assistance, which the Apostle here speaks of, there is another more particular one, and though we can resist and overcome temptation without the latter, yet it often happens that we do not.

It is not that it is beyond our power to resist the temptation, if we wish, because, according to the Apostle, the first general grace is sufficient, but we do not fall if we are assisted at the time of temptation by the special grace. But as this special and efficacious grace is the pure gift of God's great mercy and liberality, He is not pleased to give it to all men, nor upon all occasions, but only to whom He pleases, and as a rule He gives it to such only as act generously and liberally towards Him.

St. Ignatius in his Constitutions teaches this doctrine where he says: "The stricter union we make with God, and the more liberal we show ourselves to the Divine Majesty, the more bountiful shall we find Him to us, and we shall dispose ourselves to receive daily more and more graces from Him" (Ign. reg. 19).

St. Gregory Nazianzen, and many other Fathers of the Church, maintain the same doctrine (Greg. Naz. hom. 19).

In order to understand what it is to be liberal towards Almighty God, we need but consider what it is to be liberal towards man. To be liberal is to give to another more than we owe him, and more than we are obliged to give him: for to give him barely what is his right, is not called liberality but justice. Whosoever then makes it his chief care to please God, not only in matters of duty and obligation, but also in those things which are of supererogation, and which tend to a more eminent perfection, and this not only in great matters, but even in the smallest, is said to be truly liberal towards God, and in return God will recompense him liberally. For God is always pleased to make those, who are thus

faithful to Him, His chief favourites, and pours His blessings on them in greater abundance ; nor does He confine Himself to that general assistance which is sufficient to resist temptations, but He bestows on them special and efficacious graces, whereby they always triumph over the assaults of the devil.

But if you are not liberal towards God, how can you expect He should be liberal towards you, and if you offer your gifts to Him with a parsimonious hand, must you not expect that He will treat you in the same manner ?

If you are afraid of doing much for Him, if you always hold the compass in your hand, to measure what you are obliged to do under pain of sin ; if you examine whether the omission be mortal or only venial ; if in fine, you intend to give to God no more than what you think to be precisely His right, you plainly show that you are a miser, and you must fear that He will be more sparing of His blessings towards you. You must expect no more than what He is bound by His promise to give, to wit, the general aid which He grants to everyone, that is, such aid as is necessary and sufficient to overcome temptations ; but you have reason to apprehend, that He will not bestow on you that special and efficacious grace, which He usually gives to those who deal more liberally with Him.

It is in this sense we are to understand the opinion of divines, and holy men in general, when they say that a subsequent sin is usually the punishment of a former, because by our first sin we render ourselves unworthy of God's particular grace, and thereby easily fall into a second sin.

They also say the same of venial sins, and extend it even to very slight faults ; they even maintain that a certain negligence is alone sufficient to render a man unworthy of this special and efficacious grace. Some of them explain in the same manner the words of the Wise Man, "He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little" (Ecclus. xix. 1) ; and say that in consequence of this neglect and contempt we deserve to

be deprived of the extraordinary assistance of God's grace, through want of which these cold and tepid Christians afterwards run into great disorders.

Divines give the same interpretation of this passage of the Apocalypse: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth" (Apoc. iii. 16).

Speaking of our spiritual enemy the devil, and of the continual war he wages against us, St. Chrysostom observes, that the means here described is very proper and efficacious for resisting and overcoming temptations. "You know," he says, "that we have an irreconcilable enemy, from whom we must expect neither peace nor truce; so that if we would not be overcome, we must stand continually on our guard. But what shall we do, not only to prevent ourselves from being overcome, but even to defeat the enemy? Would you know it?" says the Saint: "The only means we have to vanquish him, is to merit the assistance of Heaven by the purity and innocence of our lives; it is thus we shall be always victorious" (Cor. hom. 60, Sup. Gen.). We must remark that the Saint does not say it is the *best*, but that it is the *only* means whereby we shall be victorious. St. Basil tells us the same, when he says, "That he who expects assistance from God, must never be deficient in performing his duty in the best manner he is capable of, and if he acts in this manner, divine grace will never be wanting to him; wherefore we must be extremely cautious, that our conscience may not accuse us of anything whatsoever" (Bas. in Const. mon. Cap. II).

From these words of St. Basil, it is evident we should resolve to perform all our spiritual exercises, and our other actions, with so much attention and exactness that our conscience may have nothing to reproach us with, and that thereby we may obtain that special grace, which is so requisite for our salvation. It is therefore plain, that we ought to set a great value upon small things, if those things can be called small, which are capable either of procuring us so much happiness, or of drawing down

upon us so much misery. Hence, "he that feareth God, neglecteth nothing" (Ec. vii. 19), because he knows that, from the slightest faults, we fall by little and little into great crimes ; and he is afraid that if he deals not liberally with God, His Divine Majesty will cease to deal liberally with him.

To conclude—we ought to hold it for a general maxim, that as long as we consider the smallest things that conduce to perfection as matters of great importance, all will go well with us, and we shall attract the blessings and assistance of heaven : but, on the contrary, if we neglect the small things we shall expose ourselves to great danger ; for by this carelessness and indifference sin may find entrance into the soul.

This our Blessed Lord intimated when He said, "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater, and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater" (Luke xvi. 10). When, therefore, you desire to know whether you advance in virtue, examine carefully whether you are faithful in small things, or whether you despise or neglect them ; if you perceive that you make no account of them, and yet that your conscience feels not the remorse you had been wont to feel on similar occasions, be sure to remedy this evil speedily and with all possible care.

For St. Basil says, "That the devil, when he cannot prevail on us to commit great sins, strains every nerve to dissuade us from aiming at perfection, and to excite in us an indifference for small things : hoping at least to deceive us, by instilling into us a vain confidence that God, in consequence of such neglect, will not deprive us of His holy grace" (Bas. ser. de renun. Spir. perfect.).

But we, on our part, should always endeavour to act in such a manner that it may be impossible for him to divert us from perfection ; for this purpose we must always aspire to perfection, and set a great value upon the smallest things conducive to it (*Christian Perfection*, Vol I, Treatise 1, Chap. x).

CHAPTER XXVII.

The necessity for Perseverance.

St. Austin, explaining the words of St. Paul, "For he also, that striveth for the mastery, is not crowned except he strive lawfully" (2 Tim. ii. 5), says, that to fight lawfully is to fight with perseverance to the end, and that only those who fight in this manner deserve a crown. And he adds with St. Jerome, "that many begin well, but few end well" (*Contra Jovin*). Of this we have a great example in the Israelites. Holy Scripture observes, that there went out of Egypt about six hundred thousand men, besides women and children; and that, nevertheless, of all that great number, there were but two that entered into the Land of Promise.

"It is then," adds the Saint, "no great matter to begin, but the chief thing is to perfect what we have begun; for it is in that alone that perfection consists" (*Aug. Serm. ad frat. in Erim.*).

St. Ephrem makes use of a very just comparison on this subject, saying, "that as when you build a house, the greatest difficulty lies not in laying the foundation, but in raising the building to its perfect height, and that the higher the building is raised, the more the labour and the expenses increase: so in the Spiritual building it is not the hardest task to lay the foundation, but to carry your work on to perfection" (*Exhort. ad Piet.*).

It will avail us nothing to have begun well, unless we also end well: "In Christians," says St. Jerome, "we consider not how they begin, but how they end. St. Paul began ill, but ended well; Judas began well, but ended ill" (*Ad Furiam Vid.*).

What did it avail him to have been an Apostle of Jesus Christ, and to have wrought miracles? Wherefore,

what will your good beginnings avail, if a miserable end contradicts and gives them the lie? It is to perseverance only that the Crown is promised: "He that shall persevere to the end," says the Son of Man, "he shall be saved" (Matt. xxiv. 13). Jacob saw Almighty God, not at the foot, nor in the middle, but at the top of the ladder; to let us know, says St. Jerome, that "it is not enough to begin well, nor yet to continue to do well only for a time, unless we hold on and persevere to the end" (Ep. ad Ab. Gaurin). "What does it avail," says St. Bernard, to follow Jesus Christ, unless we overtake him at last?" Wherefore St. Paul bids us run so as that at last we may gain the prize (1 Cor. ix. 24). Let thy race, O Christian! and thy progress in virtue have no other bounds than what Jesus Christ prescribed to Himself: "He rendered himself obedient even to death." It is vain for you to run unless you continue your race to the last moment of your life. Without this you will never get the prize.

The Son of God gives us a special warning of this, when he assures us, that "no man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke ix. 62). As also when, at another time, he bids us remember Lot's wife" (Luke xvii. 32). What was it she did? God having brought her out of Sodom, in order to save her from the fire which consumed that city, she stopped upon the way, and turned to look behind her, and immediately in the very place where she turned her head, she was changed into a statue of salt. Would you know, says St. Austin, what this signifies? Salt seasons and preserves everything, and Our Saviour would have us remember Lot's wife, to the end, that, reflecting on what happened to her we may preserve ourselves with that salt, which her transformation does furnish us with; that is to say, that taking warning by the example of her punishment, we may go on and persevere in that good course of life, into which we are entered, without stopping or looking behind us, lest we ourselves should be turned also into statues, from which

others may take salt, for their own preservation. Alas ! how many are there now-a-days, who serve us for statues of salt, like that of Lot's wife ? How many are there whose fall may serve us for a warning, and become of great advantage to us, in order to our eternal salvation ? Let us then be wise at other men's cost, and let us endeavour to do nothing that may make others become wise at our expense.

St. Austin and St. Jerome further add that "to begin well and end ill, is to make a monster, as if a painter, after he had drawn the head of a man, should add to it the neck of a horse (Ad frat. in Erem., Ser. 8). St. Paul writing to the Galatians, reprehends them very severely for proceeding after this manner. What, says he, are you grown to such a height of folly, as that having once begun well in the spirit you will needs end in the flesh ? Senseless men ! who has bewitched you, thus to rebel against truth ? (Gal. iii. 1).

But to the end we may obtain God's holy grace to persevere in doing well, we must strive to lay at first a good foundation of virtue and mortification ; for if the foundation be weak, the building will quickly come to lean, and so fall to the ground. That fruit into which the worm has once crept, never ripens, but soon falls from the tree ; while that which is sound sticks fast to the branch, till it is perfectly ripe ; in the same manner if your virtue be not solid, and your heart not wholly possessed by God, and if you still cherish the worm of presumption, of pride, of impatience, or any other irregular passion ; that worm will by degrees corrupt your heart, and consume all its best juice and substance ; and to speak more clearly, you will run the danger of not persevering. Wherefore it is very necessary to confirm and fortify your heart by grace (Hebrews xiii. 9), and in time to lay a solid foundation of true virtue.

Albertus Magnus, explaining by what means we ought to confirm ourselves in virtue, to be the better able to persevere, says, that a true Christian ought to be so well grounded in virtue, and ought to have it so firmly rooted

in his heart, that it may be always in his power to practise it, without any dependence upon what other men can say or do to him. There are persons who outwardly seem to have the spirit of meekness and humility, so long as nothing thwarts them, and all things happen as they wish ; but upon the least cross accident that occurs, this peace vanishes, and they presently take fire, and discover what they are.

Such men as these, says Albertus, have not the virtue of peace and humility in their own, but in other men's minds and humours ; so that if your virtue be such as this, it belongs to others and not to you, since it lies in their power to give, or take it from you, whensoever they please. But your virtue, if it be true, must be your own and not of another's growth, and the fund ought always to be at your own disposal, without any dependence upon another.

We may make a very just comparison of such persons as those, to a stagnant water which yields no bad smell or vapour so long as you do not trouble it ; but disturb it once, and it sends forth a stench so intolerable that it is enough to poison those that stand by.

Just so it is with these men, as long as you leave them to themselves, as long as nobody vexes them, they are in profound peace, they seem as quiet as stagnant water that offends nobody ; but as soon as they are molested or the least moved, presently such pernicious vapours are raised, as give great scandal, and very bad example to their neighbour. "Touch the mountains, and they shall smoke" (Ps. cxliii. 5). (*Christian Perfection*, Vol I, Treatise 1, Chapter xvii).

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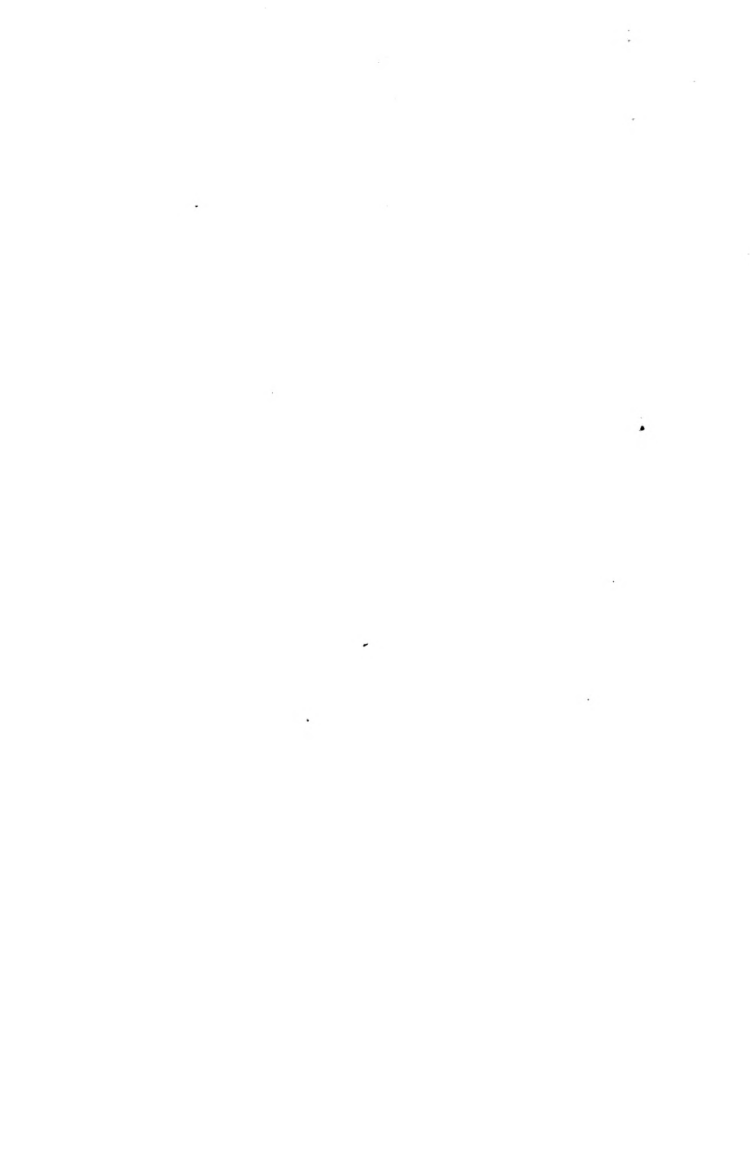
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